

RAINBOW GOLD



MILLCENT EVISON



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RAINBOW GOLD



“SO NOW I GUESS YOU KNOW THE WHOLE FAMILY, FOR I HAVEN’T
BOTHERED TO NAME THE HENS AND CHICKENS.”—Page 52.

RAINBOW GOLD

By
MILLICENT EVISON

Illustrated by
WILFRED I. DUPHINEY



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Rainbow Gold



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To
My Mother
and her granddaughter,
Helen Margaret McEntee

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Rainbow Gold

CHAPTER I

THE "DEAD MARCH" AND "YANKEE DOODLE"

The musical score is written for piano in 4/4 time. It consists of two systems of music, each with a treble and bass staff joined by a brace. The first system begins with a treble staff containing a series of chords and a melodic line, with dynamic markings *p*, *ff*, *p*, and *ff*. The bass staff is mostly silent, with a few notes and a large chord marked with an 'x' and a vertical line of notes. Pedal markings include *Ped.* under the first measure and ** Ped.* under the fourth measure. The second system continues the melody in the treble staff with *p*, *ff*, *p*, and *ff* dynamics. The bass staff again has minimal notation, with a large chord marked with an 'x' and a vertical line of notes. A ** Ped.* marking is present under the fourth measure. The score ends with a final chord in the bass staff.

TONI strummed the melancholy air in a jerky, disconnected manner, using her forefingers in a stiff, horizontal position for the thirds. She landed on the chords with all the force of her slim arms, producing a crash which was augmented by a continuous use of the open pedal, making all the wires of the piano vibrate and rumble.

Mrs. Omar Khayyam, the Persian cat, was dozing and purring in sleepy comfort near the fire. She would open a green eye and half-raise her fluffy tail when the chords shattered the drowsy peace of her slumbers. Then, after a couple of lazy blinks at the flames, she purred and slept again.

When Toni began the dreary march for the third time, her brother, Basil, who was lying on the couch near one of the windows, threw a magazine at her. It fell on the keys with a clatter of treble discords, and Cecily exclaimed in pleading tones: "Oh, Toni, do stop! You'll drive me mad with that awful thing!"

Toni left the piano and went over to the front window. She curled herself on the wide seat, after giving the cushions a few sounding blows with her clenched fists.

"I *have* to do something to relieve my feelings," she announced between blows.

"Well, if you find the 'Dead March' a lullaby for your nerves, it's more than we do, especially when it is thumped as you play it," said Basil. "Cecily and I have our bruised emotions, but we don't attempt to soothe them by adding to the woes of other people."

"No, you mope behind a magazine and don't speak for hours; and Cecily moons before the grate,

with a face that is doleful enough to put the fire out. The silence of you two is worse than any noise that I can make. You are as depressing as the weather. If I could play a noisy Liszt rhapsody or one of Chopin's mildewy nocturnes, I'd give vent to my feelings in a classical way; but the only tunes I know are Saul's 'Dead March' and 'Yankee Doodle.' "

She began to whistle "Yankee Doodle," which she accompanied with a tapping on the window-pane in the monotonous rhythm of the "Dead March." Her breath made a little cloud of mist on the glass, as she watched the raindrops coursing down the pane and splashing on the sill. Tears fell from her long lashes, and her lips quivered so that "Yankee Doodle" wandered into a minor key and ended with a strangled sob.

She could see the pipe from the eaves at the corner of the house pouring forth a tiny Niagara, which carved its way through a bed of disheveled asters until it joined a small torrent raging along the path to the gate. The rain descended in a ceaseless, heavy downpour, and the asphalt pavement of the street was black and shiny, like the back of a whale. A wind moaned among the trees; leaves—red, brown, and yellow—fluttered sadly down and lay in sodden piles on the sidewalk.

The living-room of the Hamilton home had an air of friendly comfort which a room always acquires when the members of a family use it every day for work and play and cozy fireside evenings. Low book-shelves, filled with treasures from the literature of various lands, were built on all sides of the room except for the spaces occupied by the recessed windows. Above the shelves the walls were covered with a soft yellow paper, which caught the light and seemed to radiate a sunny cheer. There were several reproductions of famous pictures, and two or three choice bronzes and marbles. A Jacobean table held an inviting array of books, magazines, and newspapers. Willow chairs, with cushions of browns and yellows, were placed here and there, without any pretense of order; and a huge, old-fashioned couch added a suggestion of snugness to the room.

Despite the gloom outside, the shadows that lurked in the corners of the room, and the depressed spirits of the three Hamiltons, the fire did its best to be cheerful. It crackled and spluttered, and the flames, like elves attired in ruddy gold, leaped and whirled in a dance of glee. A little log oozed moisture at one end with a soft, sizzling noise, as though it were repeating the whispers of wind and leaves overheard in the forest long ago.

Cecily Hamilton sat in one of the low chairs before the fireplace. She was a plump, fair girl of fourteen, with soft brown hair, which caught glints of gold from the firelight, and deep blue eyes like dewy violets. Her hands lay in her lap, and twitched nervously, as she unconsciously tapped the floor with a slippered foot.

Basil, who was her elder by three years, was on the couch. A crutch propped against the pillows gave the reason for his pale face and slender form. He had always been delicate, and years of suffering had left their traces in deep shadows about his patient brown eyes. Yet there were times when Basil was the jolliest of the Hamilton trio.

Toni, whose real name was Antoinette, was fifteen. Her thin body seemed to have forgotten to grow, except in the way of arms and legs, so she had the lean, lanky appearance of a straggling bit of weed. Her brown eyes flashed with anger or mischief according to her mood. Her hair was a mass of dark, unruly curls that persisted in escaping from the restraint of ribbons, as though they were determined to tickle her droll little face.

"There's the postman!" she cried; and the gate clicked noisily behind a tall, rubber-coated man, who came towards the house.

With a bound and two jumps Toni was out of the room to open the front door to the postman, who gave her a letter addressed to Basil.

When she returned to the others, the room was brightened with a golden glow from the large lamp on the table. Basil had left the couch and now sat in one of the chairs. Cecily was rearranging the magazines and newspapers at one end of the table. She winced as her eye caught the headline in large, black letters on one of the papers: "HAMILTON GETS TEN YEARS IN PRISON."

She crushed the paper with an angry gesture and threw it into the fire. The flames blazed up as though they shared her anger, and when they died down the word, "Prison," glowed and seared the hearts of the three children, who watched it sink into ashes.

There was a tense silence. Toni stood with the forgotten letter crushed in her hand. They mentally reviewed the sorrow which had blackened their lives,—the hideous sorrow which had culminated in the disgrace of their father. His illness at the beginning of the year had been but a passing shadow, for, after three months at a sanatorium, he had returned to his family with renewed health and the old eager zest for work. He at once resumed his duties as president of the Argus Trust Company,

but the children soon noticed a look of weary anxiety about his eyes.

There were endless meetings with directors; and Joseph Kershaw, the vice president of the company, frequently came to the house. These interviews always left their father looking more worried than before, and twice they had overheard a heated quarrel between the two men.

Then came a day of panic for the city. The Argus Trust Company closed its doors, and the streets were blocked with angry, anxious depositors whose money had been gambled away.

Even then the children did not dream of disgrace, though they realized that their father was a heart-broken man. His arrest was an overwhelming blow, but their sense of security never wavered. The long, weary weeks before the trial held no suspense for them; for they had a firm conviction of his innocence, and looked forward to his acquittal and complete exoneration. The fact that many citizens put up security for bail strengthened their confidence, and they knew no fear when the trial began.

Suddenly everything changed, and they learned with dismay that the evidence was turning against their father. Schoolmates looked askance at the two girls, friends ceased to call, and several stores

closed their charge accounts. The daily papers were darkened with slurring captions, and on this gloomy afternoon extra editions had been issued, proclaiming the decision of the court. Their kind, indulgent father had been found *guilty*!

Toni tossed back her hair and suddenly remembered the letter in her hand. She gave it to Basil without a word.

"It must be from Grandfather!" he exclaimed, glancing at the postmark.

"Oh!" gasped Cecily, and she sank into a chair beside him.

Toni sprawled on a tiger-skin rug, her chin resting on its head and her fingers clutching its wide-open jaws.

Basil opened the letter slowly. It was written in a peculiar, cramped hand, and the boy's thin face flushed with mortification as his eyes followed the brief lines.

"What does he say?" Cecily's blue eyes widened with frightened interrogation.

"I—I can't ——— Here, Toni, you read it," he said, as he tossed the letter to his sister.

Toni began:

"MY DEAR GRANDCHILDREN:

"Permit me to introduce myself as your grandfather, and to offer you the shelter of the

home your mother deserted eighteen years ago. As you have probably been told, she defied me when she married John Hamilton, and I have not forgotten it.

"Your father has written to me, and I have read a full account of your affairs in the newspapers; so it appears to be my duty to care for my disobedient daughter's three children.

"I have decided to have you come here, but I do not intend that my home shall be upset by your presence. You must adapt yourselves to conditions as you find them, and you will all assume the name of Hastings when you enter this house.

"Your grandfather,

"BASIL HASTINGS."

Toni stood up and threw the letter on the table. "I won't go and live in his old house! I won't—I won't!" and she stamped up and down the room in a whirlwind of fury.

"If I weren't such a weakling ——" Basil began helplessly.

"He's a p-p-p-perfect b-b-b-beast!" went on Toni.

"He's a *bile, vase billain!*" cried Cecily, meaning "vile, base villain."

In moments of excitement she often provoked much merriment by mixing her words in a funny jumble, but under the stress of their emotion this verbal tangle went unnoticed.

"I'm such a useless brother for you girls to have, crippled as I am; otherwise we might think of some plan that would enable us to refuse this—generous offer," Basil sighed.

"Dad said we were to go to Grandfather—if he would have us," said Cecily. "There is nothing else that we can do. We have no money. Grandfather is a cruel, bitter old man! It will be awful to live with him. I'd rather go into an orphan asylum."

"And to change our name!" Toni glared at the unoffending lamp. "Cecily *Hastings*, if you please! Basil *Hastings*, and Toni—Antoinette—*Hastings*!"

She made a sweeping bow and distorted her face with a derisive grin, which resembled the open, snarling jaws of the tiger-skin.

"Our mother's name was—Antoinette Hastings," remarked Basil quietly.

Toni broke down. "Oh, Mother, Mother!" she sobbed, as she knelt at Cecily's feet and buried her face in her sister's lap.

Presently Basil spoke.

"There is no way out of it; we have to go. And, in accepting our grandfather's hospitality—no, I should say, *charity*—we must also accept the conditions he imposes. So far as changing our name

is concerned, I shall be glad to do it. I hate the sight of the name Hamilton! Those newspapers have made it seem like a brand of shame. I want to forget that it *is* my name."

"Sneak!" hissed Toni, as she sprang quickly from the floor. "You and Cecily are a pair of c-c-cads! You haven't actually said it, but I know you both believe that Dad is guilty!"

"We aren't snads and skeaks—I mean cads and sneaks!" broke in Cecily. "The evidence ——"

"The evidence!" scoffed Toni. "Two or three lying witnesses, led by that vice president—that Pecksniff-Uriah-Heepy man whose name is nothing but a sneeze—Kershaw! I know he is at the bottom of the whole trouble, and he is the one who ought to be in prison. A man with a voice like his should never be trusted; it sounds like warm oil."

"Business men are doing every day what Dad is imprisoned for,—speculating with funds entrusted to their care," remarked Basil. "If he hadn't been ill, this awful calamity wouldn't have happened."

"That's it," snapped Toni. "It was during Dad's illness that Kershaw started his monkeying with stocks and other people's bonds; and now he has succeeded in shifting the blame upon Dad."

"If Dad could have proved his innocence," said Cecily plaintively.

“ He has to *prove* his innocence before you will believe in him, has he? ” questioned Toni with blazing eyes. “ Dad *is* innocent, and all the courts and judges in the world can’t make me doubt him. You and Basil think he gambled away those funds because he was ill and didn’t realize what he was doing; but I know that Dad had nothing to do with the swindle. Some day he will be able to *prove* his innocence, as you say; and then won’t you two be proud of yourselves! Won’t you be proud of your faith in Dad after you have dragged it in the mire! I’ll flaunt my faith like a banner,—a rainbow on this cloud of disgrace; and then I shall be able to meet Dad with all my colors flying. But you—you’ll feel like a pair of worms. That’s just what you are—worms, *worms*, WORMS! ”

CHAPTER II

LEAVES IN THE WIND

THE door opened slowly, and a trim little woman, wearing a large white apron, entered, carrying a well-filled tray. Cecily hastily cleared a space on the table.

“My bairnies, I thought ye wad find this room mair cheerful for your supper than the big dining-room,” said Jean, as she put the tray on the table. “And my heart will be sair if ye don’t eat well what I have prepared for ye.”

“Oh, thank you, Jean!” exclaimed Cecily. “It *is* much cozier in here.”

“What ails my Bit Lady?” asked Jean, looking at the tempestuous Toni, who had once more thrown herself down on the tiger-skin, with her elbows braced on either side of the head and her hands supporting her chin.

“I’m just getting over a storm, Jean”; and Toni blinked her tears away.

Jean stooped and picked up a piece of folded white paper which lay on the rug.

"There's writing on it," she said, and gave it to Basil.

"What is it?" asked Cecily as he smoothed the creases.

"It must have dropped out of the letter," answered Basil.

"Read it, read it!" urged Toni, sitting up.

Basil complied:

"I am slipping this inside my brother's letter. He must not know that I have written; but I want to tell you that we—Priscilla and I—will be glad to see Annette's children. They will be dear to us for her sake.

"When you come, try not to mind any harsh things your grandfather may say—he ——"

The note ended abruptly.

"That must be frae Miss Olivia. She was always a puir, frightened creature," observed Jean with a birdlike tilt of her head.

"Tell us about Grandfather, Jean," begged Toni, coming to the table where Cecily was serving creamed chicken. "You lived in his house before Mother married Dad. What is he like?"

"That I did, and I'll make ye acquainted wi' the old gentleman. And it's a cup o' tea I'll have while I'm doing it," replied Jean, determined to get them sufficiently interested in her story so that they

would eat a hearty supper while forgetting their sorrow.

"Now, I'm not going to turn ye against your grandfeyther, but ye might as weel ken that he's no easy to live with. He had a heap o' troubles in his time, and it turned him bitter, and I don't suppose he's improved with age. He's rich, very rich in money, but he's puir in soul. The love he had for his family was poisoned wi' selfishness."

"He's a tyrant, isn't he?" asked Basil.

"Hoots laddie! He's ten tyrants. And those aunts, his sisters, had no more spirit than a dish o' watered milk. Miss Annette, your mither, had a will of her ain, but even she might have wilted if your feyther hadn't come along. The old gentleman wouldn't hear of the marriage. He fairly went mad wi' rage and locked Miss Annette in her room, insisting that she should give up her sweetheart, which she wadna do. The puir old man worshipped his daughter, and he couldna bear the thought of her marrying and going away."

"How did Mother get out and marry Dad?" inquired Cecily.

"I'm coming to that," replied Jean. "Miss Priscilla, that's the invalid aunt, had a wee bit spunk left in her, and she arranged wi' me a grand scheme, and I got a word to your feyther to be

ready. One evening, when your grandfeyther had gone to Miss Annette's room wi' her supper, and to give her his nightly lecture on obedience and humility, Miss Priscilla screamed out, 'Fire! fire!' Of course, every one rushed to her room, and your grandfeyther was the first to get there," Jean chuckled.

"And—*was* there a fire?" cried Toni.

"There was a wee bit of a fire, and a fine lot of smoke it made, for Miss Priscilla crawled out o' bed and shoveled a few live coals onto the rug before the grate. Then she crawled back again. It's surprising the strength that comes to invalids when they really need it."

"Wh-wh-what happened then?" gasped Toni.

Jean smiled quietly. "Of course, I was ready wi' Miss Annette's cloak and hat, and a bag packed wi' extra clothes; and in the midst o' the excitement we ran out of the house, and your feyther was waiting at the gate wi' a horse and carriage. Then off we went to the next town, where the young folks were married, wi' me as one o' the witnesses.

"Your grandfeyther never forgave Miss Annette. She wrote to him, but her letters were always returned—torn across. Even when she died he made no sign o' tenderness, and there has been no letter from your aunts since then. Your grand-

feyther's a hard, bitter old man. His soul is twisted out o' shape, like that bitter-apple tree at the end o' the garden."

"It must be terrible to become old like Grandfather and be feared and disliked by every one," said Toni reflectively. "Poor old bitter-apple tree! But, you know, our old tree blossoms beautifully every spring; and perhaps human beings have a secret blossoming-time."

Jean gave the girl a loving glance.

"Maybe you're right, lassie; and perhaps it is that your going up to that loveless home will bring back springtime to those three people. There may be a good reason for your exile."

"I wish you could go with us," said Cecily in wistful tones.

"No, here I stay," began Jean, "and here I'll be when ye come back; for ye are coming back, bairnies, when the stupid world kens that your feyther is innocent."

Toni rushed over to Jean and gave her a vehement hug.

"You don't believe Dad is guilty, do you, Jean?" she implored.

Jean drew the girl onto her knee. "My lassie, your feyther had naething to do wi' the crooked work, and there's something back o' it all that will

be brought to light some day. So he wants ye to go to your grandfeyther, bairnies. It's the only thing to be done now. He sent his love to ye all." Tears glittered in Jean's honest brown eyes.

"Oh! I can't bear to think of his being in prison for ten years!" cried Toni. "I wish I might go and see him before we leave!"

Jean shook her head. "No, he wadna wish to have ye see him there. Ye'll be leaving for the North in a few days. My, but I shall miss ye!"

"Let us have a little music," suggested Cecily, when Maggie had taken the dishes to the kitchen.

"Give us some of the auld Scotch tunes, Basil," requested Jean, as Toni nestled on the rug at her feet.

"Yes, Jean," assented Basil, and he hobbled over to the piano.

He laid his crutch on the floor and seated himself before the instrument. Here Basil was no weakling. His mastery of the keyboard was phenomenal; and, had he not been afflicted with wretched health, he might have aimed for a brilliant career as a pianist. His wonderful talent had been under the wise direction of a clever teacher, who had recognized and developed the genius of the delicate boy without forcing an abnormal growth of precocity.

There was nothing morbid or gloomy in Basil's music. His playing had a romantic, dreamy quality at times; and then it would assume a verve and fire remarkable for a lad with his weak frame.

Mrs. Omar Khayyam was a musical cat; and it was her daily custom to doze on one end of the piano during Basil's hours of practice. A soft woollen mat, knitted by Jean, was always ready for her, so that her claws should not scratch the veneered surface of the instrument. Mrs. Omar now jumped up to her throne at the left of the keyboard, and gave Basil a patronizing look, as if she would say, "Now, let us see what you can do."

Basil glanced at the others with a whimsical smile and said, "We'll begin with a splurge."

He played Liszt's Twelfth Rhapsody brilliantly. Then followed a Chopin mazurka, dreamily sad, yet joyous, like bright flowers in a lonely, forgotten garden.

"And now—for bonnie Scotland!"

Under his delicate, caressing touch the singing tones of the Steinway crooned the quaint Scotch melodies: "Annie Laurie," "Loch Lomond," "Jock o' Hazeldean," and "Lochaber No More" were like a bunch of Scottish bluebells tied together with a thread of dreamy improvisation.

Jean, looking into the fire, saw the sun rise over

the wide moors of her girlhood home in far-away Scotland. In fancy she wandered there again with the braw laddie who had given her the faded sprig of heather that had lain in her Bible for many, many years. He had given it to her just before he went away to fight for his country. Now her thoughts led her from the wind-swept moors to an unknown sandy waste in an eastern land, and there she laid a wreath of memory's heather on the nameless grave of her soldier laddie. Under her breath she murmured with Basil's music: "But me an' my true love will never meet again, on the bonnie, bonnie banks o' Loch Lomon'!"

The huge log in the grate, undermined by the glowing coals beneath it, suddenly sank and sent forth a shower of sparks and ashes.

"Piff! paff! puff!" exclaimed Toni, as she scrambled up from the floor.

"It's a fire we'll be having, and me sitting here wi' my gabbing tongue and my wits wandering, never thinking o' putting up the wire screen," said Jean.

With Spartan courage she hastily picked a burning coal from the rug and threw it into the grate, and Toni danced out the other smoking places on the rug.

Mrs. Omar elevated her back with a prolonged

stretch and yawned. She then descended majestically to the keyboard, and Basil's playing of "Auld Lang Syne" ended abruptly as Her Feline Highness walked over the keys in a cool, deliberate fashion, producing a theme similar to that immortalized by Scarlatti long ago.

"Our music ends with 'The Cat's Fugue,'" laughed Basil; and he carefully closed the piano after Mrs. Omar had leaped to the floor.

The storm outside had risen to greater violence, and the rain dashed furiously against the windows. The wind wrestled, like an invisible giant, with the great trees near the house, lashing their mighty boughs and making them creak ominously.

"I'm thinking there won't be a leaf left on the trees by morning," said Jean.

"Poor little leaves!" murmured Cecily with a sigh. "A few days ago they were so bright and gay in their autumn gowns, and now they are torn and blown about by the storm."

"Just as we are," added Basil. "We are leaves in the wind, tossed by the storms of Fate."

CHAPTER III

A JOURNEY INTO EXILE

THE rain descended drearily and steadily during their last days at home. The wind, having attained its object of stripping the branches of their foliage, had departed with wild gusts of victory, and the denuded trees were like a vanquished army whose banners of gold and crimson had been seized as spoils and trophies of war and carried off by the enemy. The lawn became a sodden marsh, where little pools formed and splashed up, as if feebly defying the rain. The few remaining asters were limp and broken. The last sturdy sunflower, which stood in a sheltered corner by the summer-house, drooped, as the rain tore its golden petals away, and the ripe seeds fell like tears to the ground.

"I haven't said good-by to anybody," sighed Cecily, as they ate their last breakfast in their home.

"Nor I," added Toni. "I don't intend that any one shall have the chance of snubbing or sneering at me."

Jean sat at one end of the table. "Bairnies, don't get bitter! It's trouble that shows us the true worth o' oor friends."

"Yes," agreed Toni, pressing her lips together to keep them from quivering. "There's nothing like trouble and disgrace for testing our friends. Yesterday, when I went to school to get all our books and belongings, I was shunned as though I was an infectious disease. Even Angela Moore, who had sworn eternal friendship with me, passed me by with a cold stare and an audible sniff. And what friends we have been all these years! I was terribly fond of Angela. If—if any sorrow had come to her, I should have loved her more than ever."

Toni gulped down some cocoa and blinked two intruding tears from her eyes.

"Some of the girls spoke to you, didn't they?" asked Cecily. "It was awfully good and brave of you to go after our things, Toni. I simply *couldn't* have faced them! Ever since poor Dad was arrested I have hated to go out, or even to look out of the window. I never want to see any of our old friends again! I'm really glad we are going away, although I dread living with Grandfather."

"Yes, some of the girls were quite decent; that is, they tried to seem friendly in a self-conscious sort of way. They looked as cheerful as if they

were gathering flowers to put on my grave. It was Angela's treatment that hurt me most. Just as I was leaving, she returned my ruler, which she had borrowed ages ago, and I threw it with a shudder of disgust into the waste-paper basket. If I hadn't indulged in a bit of temper I should have cried. So my temper is useful after all. Angela—pooh! She's an angel of friendship, isn't she? Her heart has no more friendship in it than a—a—a petrified mosquito."

Toni hacked the top off her egg with a vicious blow of her knife.

"Whew!" whistled Basil; and he made an exaggerated pretense of dodging the lightning-shafts of Toni's wrath.

"Even Jimmie Blake hasn't been near the house," continued Toni. "And I was as chummy with him as I was with Angela. Besides, one doesn't expect a boy to sneak and snivel and act like a mean snip of a girl. I think he might have come to see us. One would think we were quarantined for smallpox!"

"I saw Dr. Atkinson's motor in front of the Blakes' house the other day," ventured Cecily. "Perhaps Jimmie is ill. He is always getting molds or cumps—I mean colds or mumps—or measles."

“He seems to have had everything but pink-eye and elephantiasis,” observed Basil with a laugh.

Later in the morning, when the girls, with Jean’s help, were getting ready to go to the station, Maggie came to the door with a note.

“Mistah Kershaw done called an’ lef’ dis yere note. He wanted to see you-all, but Ah tole him as how you all wuz dressin’ foh to leab by de ’leven clock train an’ you-all couldn’t see nobody nohow.”

Cecily took the note and read aloud.

“MY DEAR CHILDREN:

“In this sad misfortune which has befallen you, I am anxious, as your father’s friend and former partner, to proffer my assistance in any way possible. If money is required, I shall be glad to extend any amount you may need—for old times’ sake.

“With deepest sympathy,

“Faithfully yours,

“JOSEPH KERSHAW.”

“Bah!” exclaimed Toni. “Oily Joseph! Take *his* money? He has no right to it, and he knows it,—the pious old hypocrite!”

“And I’m agreeing wi’ ye there,” supplemented Jean. “I hae nae faith in that long-faced, sanctimonious, sleek-haired, screw-eyed villain.”

They were soon ready, and drove to the station

with Jean. Cecily carried Mrs. Omar Khayyam in a large willow basket; and Toni was laden with a suitcase and a heterogeneous collection of bundles containing articles she had forgotten to pack.

Just before the train left, a fat, yellow-haired boy, with throat and ears swathed in white bandages, dashed by the guard at the gate. He ran breathlessly up to the train-window, where Toni was leaning out for a last word with Jean.

"Jimmie!" she screamed, and almost fell through the window, as she reached out both hands to the gasping boy.

"Laid up—quinsy this time—hurts like blazes—Doctor said, 'Stay in bed'—didn't know you were leaving until this morning—sneaked out—say good-by—folks will raise Cain at home when they find out! Had to come—awfully sorry—eat these—here's my pickled snake—it's the best thing I have—couldn't get out to see you or buy anything new. It's a blamed shame about everything! I don't believe your father did it. Anyway, we're chums—always, Toni. You're the best fellow I know! Write once in a while—hate writing myself. Good-by! good-by!"

The train pulled out, and Toni held on her lap a bottle containing a snake preserved in alcohol, and a large box of chocolates. The pretty satin box

was smeared with rain, for Jimmie hadn't waited to have it wrapped up when he bought it on his way to the station.

"Jimmie's a brick!" declared Basil. "May every hair of his blessed yellow head be a star for his heavenly halo by and by!"

"Jimmie's all right!" cried Toni; and her dark eyes beamed with flashes of joy through her unshed tears.

Basil drew down the window, for, now that the train had left the station, the rain was pouring in on the heedless Toni.

She opened the box. "Here, people, eat some chocolates! I'm so glad to have my faith in Jimmie restored, that I'd willingly eat his snake—if he wanted me to do so."

They feasted on candies, and, when the second call came for luncheon, they went into the dining-car to enjoy the first meal they had ever eaten on a Pullman.

"Toni, why *did* you let me eat so many chocolates?" complained Cecily, as she looked over the menu. "I'm not the least bit hungry, but I may never get a chance to eat in a diner again; so I'm going to eat now, if I have indigestion for the rest of my life!"

Toni settled down in her seat by the window with

a little wriggle of delight, and picked up the menu card, which was enclosed in a frame with a handle. She turned it over.

“Ooh! I thought there’d be a mirror on the other side. Well, I’ll use it as a fan.”

“Now, girls,” began Basil with an air of importance, “what will you have?”

They read the menu over and over, unable to choose from its tempting list of comestibles. They nibbled rolls and sipped ice-water, as they dallied down the list, from soup to cheese and coffee. Cecily, absent-mindedly, quite lost her way in strange names.

“Let’s order something strange and thrilling!” said Toni. “Something that we have never tasted before, and that we shall dream about all our lives and smack our lips over, like the old man Hawthorne describes in his introduction to ‘The Scarlet Letter.’”

“What’s ‘Marinirte Herringe’?” asked Cecily in puzzled tones.

“It’s some awful German mess,” replied Basil with disdain. “It’s first cousin to Herr Sauerkraut, and distantly related to Fräulein Limberger Käse.”

“Marinirte Herringe,” mused Cecily. “It sounds attractive.”

"Planked Steak," read Basil. "How does that hit you, girls?"

"*Steak!* We often have steak at home!" they cried together in scorn at his suggestion; and Cecily murmured vaguely, "Marinirte Herringe is what I want."

"Well, have your old herring," scoffed Basil. "You've never tasted Planked Steak, so let's try it and find out what 'planked' is."

"Perhaps it means steak that is hard as a board,—a plank, you know," hazarded Toni.

"Planked Steak, for three," wrote Basil on the order blank.

"Marinirte Herringe," insisted Cecily.

"Marinirte Herringe, for *one only*," went down.

"Now let me order something," said Toni. "You have each had a chance; now it's my turn. I'll have—er—let me see—it must be something wonderful—er——"

"Oh, hurry up!" expostulated Basil, and the waiter stood smiling down at them.

"Ah'll put in yoh ordah foh de steak, sah, an' den de young lady kin decide."

"All right," acquiesced Basil, and the waiter started down the aisle.

"Oh! I know!" Toni in her excitement stood

up. "Er—wait a moment. Er—I'll have—er—*pancakes!*"

"Canpakes? I mean pancakes!" laughed Cecily. "You've often had *them!*"

Toni sat down with a groan of dismay. "I *had* to order something, and I simply couldn't get my eyes off the word 'pancakes.' It seemed to be printed all over the card. I read over the list of soups and saw 'pancakes.' I wandered among the roasts, and was blindfolded with 'pancakes.' I dreamed of salads and had a nightmare of '*pancakes.*' When I reached the desserts I yearned for Peach Melba—whatever that is—and ordered 'Pancakes.'"

"I had a similar experience," admitted Basil. "For several moments I was sinking in a quicksand of baked beans, but I reached out for a planked steak, and the *plank* saved my life."

When the steak appeared they greeted it with rapturous exclamations.

"It looks like a magnificent oil painting—one of Inness' landscapes," said Basil.

"It's like a stage set for the Forest of Arden; and I'm sure Sothern and Marlowe—I mean Jaques and Rosalind—are hiding behind that little hummock of green peas," laughed Toni.

"Isn't it wonderful!" exclaimed Cecily, clasping

her hands. "It looks like one of those dear little Japanese gardens. It seems a pity to disarrange it and eat it! Why, what's this?" she asked, as the waiter placed a platter before her, on which a herring floated in a sea of spiced vinegar.

"It's your beloved herring," remarked Basil, elevating his nose.

"The poor thing looks—quite—sick!" Cecily's tones were dubious. "It can't even swim! I believe it must be—*dead*. I—I don't think I want to—er—eat it!" She sat back in her chair.

"Here, George, put this sad, tired fish back in the sea," ordered Basil.

"De young lady ordahed de herring, sah. Puffickly good herring, sah."

"Yes, but she's changed her mind, and will help out with the steak instead."

A sudden quiet fell upon the three children as they ate; and Toni gazed out of the window with tear-filled eyes, as the train sped along. Their thoughts were with their father; and, though his name was not mentioned, each one knew that the others were thinking of the dreary prison and the kind, loving father they were leaving behind. The arrival of Toni's pancakes helped to lift their spirits above the fog of sorrowful memories.

"M-must I eat them *all*?" Toni gasped, as she

raised the cover from the dish and disclosed several layers of pancakes, nicely browned and steaming.

“No pancakes for me,” laughed Basil. “I don’t want to spoil my last recollection of planked steak—um—um!”

Toni sighed. “Well, here goes!” She helped herself to a pancake and poured out a tiny stream of maple syrup. “If I die to-night, you will know that my death is due to my loyalty, my unswerving loyalty to—pancakes. Having ordered them, I eat them! Let my shroud be made of pancakes; and on my headstone carve a simple verse:

“Here doth lie our precious Toni,
Leggy, lanky, lean, and bony;
At the age of eight plus seven,
Pancakes took her up to heaven.”

They went back to the other car and surreptitiously gave Mrs. Omar some refreshment. After that the journey seemed tedious. Basil and Cecily dozed in uncomfortable positions, frequently waking and yawning, as they shifted and stretched their cramped legs.

Toni gazed out at the darkening landscape, where lights soon began to twinkle through the velvety blackness; and all the time blobs of rain blurred the window. Occasionally the train stopped at noisy stations. Passengers got off and

others took their places; and the damp air came in with cool, refreshing breaths, as the doors at each end of the car were opened.

An immaculate, duck-suited waiter walked through the car. "First and only call foh suppah, Diner discuhneted at Sl—err—ush—googly—gurr." His announcement ended with an indistinct jumble of syllables.

"Marinirte Herringe," murmured Cecily in her sleep.

Basil opened his eyes and smiled drowsily at Toni.

"Supper?" he whispered. "Do you feel like some more pancakes, Toni?"

"The Marinirte Herringe ate the pancake and floated over the sea on a planked steak," Cecily continued in a sleepy oblivion.

Basil gave her a gentle poke. "Your conversation is getting thick and lumpy, Cecily. Wake up and give it a stir."

"What?" Cecily started. "Are we there?"

"No; supper's ready," answered Toni.

"Supper? I don't want any," and Cecily nestled down again.

"I'll get some fruit, and that will carry us through, if we get hungry during the night," said Basil.

At half-past ten they changed cars; and, owing to some misunderstanding about sleeper reservations, they had to spend the night in the day-coach, a hot, stuffy compartment filled with sleepy passengers. Cecily and Mrs. Omar Khayyam slept soundly, the former resting her head on Toni's lap. Basil dozed fitfully, often disturbed by the shriek of the locomotive as it plunged through the darkness. The wakeful Toni was glad to see dawn creep over the sky and chase the shadows across the bare, frozen fields; though the prospect from the train-window was gray and cheerless. However, she welcomed the approach of day, after having spent so many hours looking at the black nothingness of night.

She smiled at Basil as he roused himself with a final yawn.

"I'm hungry, fearfully hungry," she whispered. "I believe I could eat pancakes, or even Cecily's despised herring."

"We'll get a jolly good breakfast in Portland," was Basil's encouraging response.

"I'm so sorry there was that mistake about our berths, for I have always wanted to sleep in a Pullman. It would give me such a millionairess sort of sensation. I simply couldn't sleep here! Every time I managed to get into a doze my head flopped

against the window, or the train stopped at stations for milk-cans, or that old man in the rear seat snored with the sound of a million frogs croaking, accompanied by a million pigs grunting."

"I have slept—a little," said Basil, "but it hasn't refreshed me at all."

"All night long I have been gazing at myself in the window-pane," continued Toni.

"Admiring yourself?"

"Sure-lee! I pretended that my reflection was the face of some one looking in at me. 'A pale, serious, interesting face, dark, ravishing eyes, and magnificent hair,' quoth I. Then I almost swooned at the vision of beauty, and felt like Narcissus gazing into the stream."

Basil laughed. "How long did that delightful delusion last?"

"Only a moment. Then my face seemed like a doughy, pasty, uncooked bun, with a couple of squinty, black currants for eyes. My next vision made me decide that I resembled nothing so much as a peeled potato."

Basil's laugh wakened Cecily, and she sat up with yawns and groans.

"O dear! Why *did* I go to sleep?" she cried. "I feel more tired and cramped than I did before!"

"Ouch! Nursing your head has given me rheu-

matism in my poor long legs. Think of having yards and yards of aching legs!" Toni stood up and stretched her numbed, aching limbs.

Basil glanced at his watch. "Get your hats on, girls! We're getting near Portland. Gather up your bundles, Toni. Here, I'll put that precious snake in my coat-pocket."

"Here beginneth the first act in our drama of exile," declaimed Toni with a tragic voice.

She took Mrs. Omar's basket in her hand and picked up her gloves and parcels. The train came to a standstill with a sudden jerk. Toni unexpectedly sat down in the aisle of the car, her parcels scattered about, and Mrs. Omar mewling in dismay.

Toni laughed gayly. "My first entrance is a sensational success."

"Oh!" cried Cecily. "You sat on the box of chocolates! They are squashed—simply squashed! I wish we had eaten them last night, though I didn't feel like it then. Now they are wasted!"

"Woe is me!" groaned Toni, regarding the broken box with a rueful glance. "All Jimmie's scrumptious candies wasting their sweetness on the dirty floor. And we might have feasted again on them! Oh, what a gorge we have missed!"

CHAPTER IV

PEACEDALE

THEY washed and breakfasted at the station; and, while waiting for the train to Peacedale, which was their destination, they had a brief stroll in the dingy neighborhood. Toni wanted to go exploring, but Basil did not feel equal to a long walk, and Cecily was sure they would miss their train if they went beyond sight of the station. So Toni's longings were thwarted, but she made them listen to her as she recited Longfellow's "My Lost Youth."

"Portland is the 'beautiful town that is seated by the sea,' " she said. "I'm sure we have time for a jaunt, and I'd love to see the house where Longfellow was born, and Deering's Woods!"

Cecily shivered. "Oh! let us go inside! This choggy fill—I mean foggy chill—is so depressing!"

It was a short journey to Peacedale, and they caught brief glimpses of the sea as the train carried them along. They were the only passengers who alighted, and they stood on the platform, sniffing

the salty air, as the train disappeared through the fog.

"Umm! how fishy and funny it smells!" cried Cecily.

"Grandfather evidently hasn't sent his coach and four to meet us," observed Basil, peering about.

"And there are no flags flying," rejoined Toni. "I certainly expected to be greeted with a brass band playing, 'There'll be a Hot Time in the Old Town To-night.'"

"It strikes me that there will be a *wet* time here to-night," said Basil. "We left a week of rain behind us, and here we are, slapped in the face by a fog that is like a wet cloth."

The station was an indistinct mass of yellow, the outlines of the structure being lost in the surrounding grayness. Some moving, spectral forms appeared from the yellow blur and resolved themselves into half a dozen fishermen, clad in flapping oilskin suits, which were the same color as the station. Without noticing the children, they passed by, with remarks on the fog and the probability of there being a good catch.

There was nothing to be seen of the town, for the dense fog hung like gray flannel over everything. They could hear the roar of the ocean and the soft, regular swishing of the waves against the shore. A

fog-bell on the wharf near by rang continually, with a dirge-like sound, and a muffled blowing of horns and whistles from passing, unseen vessels came through the gloom. Occasionally the shriek of a siren tore the air.

"It sounds like a selection from one of Wagner's operas," said the irrepressible Toni. "Ah! there's another yellow wraith!" she cried, as a tall, lanky man emerged from the station. "I'll nab him before he vanishes into vapor, as the others did."

She rushed over. The man turned and looked down at her with an air of surprise.

"Good morning," she began. "Would you be good enough to tell us how to get to Mr. Hastings's place?"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" the man exclaimed. "Are you old Mr. Hastings's grandchildren? Miss Hastings told me you were coming by the afternoon train. Cæsar Silas Hupper was to meet you then, and I was to lug your trunks over. So I calculated on getting all of Ben Sawyer's corn hauled this morning. I am jiggered, for it's a queer welcome for you to get, with no one expecting you."

"Is it very far to Grandfather's?" asked Cecily.

"A mite over three miles," he replied. "Now I've got my cart here filled with corn-shocks, but if

you young folks will climb up on top, I'll drive you over now, and come back this afternoon for your trunks. Which are yours?"

"All of those belong to us;" and Toni pointed to five trunks at the other end of the platform.

"Five trunks! I am jiggered! Are you calculating on starting a department store in Peacedale?"

Toni laughed, and the stranger began to pull their trunks under the covered section of the platform. He paused after dragging the second one.

"It would be an everlasting, eternal blessing if some one *did* wake this town up. It's a dead place. The name killed it."

"I think Peacedale is a pretty name," said Cecily. "It sounds quite poetic."

The man smiled. "Well, you're right. Peacedale would do for a poem; but if the place had been called Hustletown, it mightn't have settled down like a heap o' shells, as it has. It's *Peacedale* right enough. The shipping business that your ancestors made their money in has gone to smash, and there isn't much money in fishing. There was talk a few years ago about starting a cheese factory here; and we thought that might liven the place some. I suggested that if the factory brought

prosperity to the place, we ought to rechristen the town and call it Cheesedale. But nothing came of it. There! Now I guess you'd better climb up into the cart. Excelsior, you know, like the geezer in Longfellow's poem. The cart's so full o' corn—overflowing it is; and I guess we ought to call it a cornucopia."

He laughed at his joke and led them through the fog, to where his horse and cart were standing. The cart was piled high with corn-shocks. Toni deposited her bundles among the corn and scrambled up with ease. She held out a helping hand to Cecily, who gazed in dismay at the vehicle and its contents. Basil mounted the seat in front with the man, and held Mrs. Omar Khayyam's basket on his knee.

"Well, I guess you might as well know who I am," began the stranger, "or you'll be mistaking me for Uncle Sam."

"You do look like Uncle Sam," said Basil.

"Yes, I do; and every fourth o' July I head the town procession dressed up like U. S., and riding Ben Sawyer's white horse. But my name's Jim Trefethen, and you'll find a lot o' Trefethens hereabouts. My wife's name is Mary, but every one calls her Ma. My dog is Cerberus; the cow is Juno; and this horse is Polly Feemus. She's blind

in one eye, so I named her after the one-eyed giant that tried to kill U-lizzies, the hero in Greek mythology. So now I guess you know the whole family, for I haven't bothered to name the hens and chickens."

"Where did you get all the names from?" asked Basil.

"That's just what every one asks," answered Jim. "You see, about twelve years ago a young man came along, taking orders for books, so that he could put himself through college—Yell University; no, Yale it was. I remember it sounded like 'jail,' and I thought at first that he wanted to put himself through jail, and I said he could do that easy enough without troubling to sell books. He told us how he was anxious to get a good education and had no one to help him; so I ordered the books, with a set of shelves to hold them. And I got a sort of college education at home, without going through Yale. Every night, when the light evenings of summer are over, I read out of those books to Ma; and the wisdom I've stacked into my head makes me feel like a college professor. Of course, Ma was a great help. Before we were married she taught school over to Talbot's Corners, and for twenty years now she's been working on my grammar."

"What are the books called?" inquired Toni.

"The whole set is called 'The Home University'; and there's no intellectual subject you can't learn about in them—from Greek my-thology and the world's best literature, down to phony spelling, which I take to be spelling made easy for careless folks. To my mind Victor Hug-o is the best French writer, and Dickens and Shakespeare do credit to the English. Did you ever read 'Macbeth'?"

They all replied in the affirmative.

"Now, there's woman! She ought to be alive to-day. If she was, the women would be voting at the next election."

"You believe in woman suffrage, then?" questioned Basil.

"Suffering Cæsar! Yes. Every election time I say to Ma, 'Ma, it's a doggone shame that you can't vote!' Of course, I'm not saying that all women have sense, but Ma has more than any man I know, by gum!"

They drove slowly through the winding main street of the town, Jim pointing out different places of interest as they passed along.

"That's Porky Thompson's butcher-shop you see over there through the fog. You'd never take him for a butcher. He's the president of the lodge;

and when he sits up in the big chair, wearing his evening suit that's getting tighter every year, the rest of us feel like senators at the Capitol, helping the President of the United States to rule the country."

A few yards farther on he pointed with his whip to a square, red-brick building topped with a small belfry.

"That's the Peacedale Academy. I suppose you young people will be going there. Mr. Gifford's the new principal, and he's the first teacher I've ever seen here that didn't have some of his hair off, as if he was getting ready to wear a tight halo."

The fog lifted slightly, and they saw that the road was near a sandy cove, where several boats were lying on the beach. Fishing-nets were hung on frames, and piles of old clam-shells were scattered about. In the eastern distance a rocky point of land crowned with firs and pines jutted out into the sea and gave Peacedale its wide harbor.

"Your grandfather's place is just beyond that point. That yellow house you see over there is my place. In summer you can't see it, when the trees are in leaf. I got the job o' painting the station last spring, and I used the paint that was left over in fixing up my house. There warn't enough yel-

low, so I used some gray I had; and Ma says the house looks like a moldy cheese."

"Who lives in that little gray house near the point?" asked Toni.

"That's where Rachel Lee lives. She's a poor daft creature, and has nothing to do with any one but Ma. Twenty years ago her husband and two sons went fishing up to the Banks. They warn't heard of since, but every evening, just when the sun is building a camp fire in the west and making the water all red and gold, Rachel goes out to the point and looks for her husband's vessel. She hasn't realized that they will never come back. Sometimes she watches long after the dark comes down, and then Ma goes after her and takes her back to her house. 'You mustn't forget to have a light burning in your window, Rachel, so that John can see to put in near the house,' says Ma. And Rachel comes back like a tired child, and lights the lamp. Ma certainly knows how to help people,—children, old, young, or crazy. She has a gentle sort of managing way, Ma has. She's a kind of Ma to everybody that needs help."

"Have you any children?" asked Cecily.

"Two," replied Jim. "And they're lying in one little grave beside the church we passed a short way back."

“ Oh, I’m so sorry!” And the impulsive Toni reached out and laid a sympathetic hand on Jim’s arm.

“ It happened a good many years ago. A vessel was wrecked off the coast that night, and I’d gone with four other men in the life-boat. Ma was on the beach, trying to comfort a young woman whose husband was aboard the wreck. The poor thing was nigh crazy, and wanted to throw herself into the water; and Ma was the only one that could pacify her. It was about two in the morning, and a terrible storm was raging. Suddenly some one called out, ‘ Mis’ Trefethen, your house is afire!’ Ma turned and saw our home, with our two children asleep inside, all ablaze. She ran like a mad woman, and, before any one could stop her, she had rushed into the flames.”

“ *Oh!* ” Cecily shuddered.

“ She found the children in their crib—dead from suffocation. The flames hadn’t reached them, and they seemed to be sleeping and smiling. She brought them out, and since then she’s been Ma to everybody round these parts.”

“ What a brave woman!” exclaimed Basil.

“ Ma’s a good woman—a great woman,” rejoined Jim. “ Here’s your grandfather’s place, and I’ll just drop you at the gate,”

They stopped before a large house, which stood some distance from the road, and which was almost concealed by gloomy pines and hemlocks. Behind the white picket-fence was a very tall cedar hedge, untrimmed and irregular, but very thick. A wide gate opened on to a straight driveway leading to the house, which was of gray stone, covered with a network of leafless Virginia creeper.

“I’ll bring the trunks over this afternoon,” said Jim, as the children alighted. “And say ——” he leaned over and spoke in a whisper. “If ever this place gets too hot and uncomfortable for you, just come down to my house for a day to get cooled off.”

They looked at him with a bewildered air, and he continued: “It’s a queer place for children to be in. Miss Hastings has no more backbone than a jelly-fish; and Miss Priscilla, the sick one, has as many cranky twists to her temper as a porkypine has quills. And as for your grandfather—well, he’s *queer*! He’s had a might o’ troubles in his day and it’s made him mean. Sorrow affects folks in different ways. Some it makes sweet, kind and gentle, quiet and holy-like—that’s Ma. Others it makes mean and hard and bitter—that’s your grandfather. It may be that you children are just what those three lonely people need to put a little joy and sunshine into their lives. It won’t hurt you to try it;

and if ever you get caught in a squall and need a rock of ages—that's Ma."

"Indeed we'll come over," responded Basil for all.

"There's another thing," Jim went on. "The first time you meet Ma, don't appear to notice her face. It's badly scarred from the burns she got that night she tried to save the children. The folks round here have got used to it; but when strangers see her, it's something like a blow. To me Ma's the most beautiful woman in the world. Every mark on her poor face seems like the light shining round an angel. There isn't an angel in Heaven that can come up to Ma. They had to go to Heaven to be angels; Ma's one already!"

He turned the horse and paused before he drove back.

"Say! you all just come over some Saturday night for supper and you'll get the best beans and brown-bread cooked by the best cook in the State o' Maine—that's Ma!"

CHAPTER V

HOBGOBLIN HALL

AFTER watching Jim Trefethen drive out of sight they turned to the gate. Looking up the long driveway, they could see the front entrance of the house, with its old colonial porch. All the windows were hidden with dark-green shutters tightly closed.

“ ‘All hope abandon ye who enter here,’ ” quoted Toni dolefully as Basil opened the gate and they passed in.

“It looks about as cheerful and inviting as a tomb,” said Basil.

“How dreary the pines seem!” exclaimed Cecily. “They look like plumes from a giant’s hearse.”

“Ugh!” shuddered Toni. “The whole place is weird enough to be Hobgoblin Hall. Grandfather will be an ogre, and the two aunts a pair of witches.”

Mrs. Omar Khayyam began to mew piteously as they walked slowly up the avenue.

"Even the cat is depressed!" said Toni grimly.

When they reached the door everything seemed shut and deserted. The brass knocker, urged by Toni, spoke up for them several times, but brought forth no response.

"Let us find a side entrance," suggested Basil.

They followed a path leading to the right, and, after turning the corner of the house, they discovered a wide veranda. A dark, paneled door leading into the house stood slightly ajar.

Toni knocked at the door but gained no answer. Then she walked along the veranda. Through thick cream-net curtains she saw the flickering light of a grate fire and heard the sound of a small bell ringing impatiently.

"I'm going in," she announced. "There's some one in that room to the right; and I'm going to demand a parley without delay."

She pushed the heavy door open and the others followed. They found themselves in a large square hall. It was dimly lighted by a window at the half-way turn of the staircase, which mounted with wide, shallow steps from the gloom at the other end of the hall. Near the staircase window, which was flanked by a broad, low seat, stood a tall old-fashioned clock, ticking solemnly.

"Tick-tock, tick-tock," said Toni, keeping time

with the clock. "Hasn't it an ominous sound! It corresponds with the beating of my heart."

She paused before a closed door, and put her suitcase down.

"H'm! I think this must be the door for us," and she rapped gently.

"Come in," answered a low voice with deep contralto tones.

Toni opened the door slowly, and the three children walked in. Cecily placed Mrs. Omar's basket on the floor just inside the door.

"Annette's children!" exclaimed the voice.

On a low deck-chair, built up with gray denim pillows, sat a woman wearing a gray eiderdown dressing-gown.

"The Gray Lady," Toni mentally christened her; and, indeed, the name was suitable, for everything about her was gray. Her hair, drawn tightly back from her face, her eyes, and even her complexion were tinged with the same dull shade.

"Are you Aunt Priscilla?" asked Basil, as he hobbled forward.

Aunt Priscilla nodded affirmatively, and she looked at them through half-closed eyes for several minutes without saying a word.

"You"—she pointed to Cecily, who started violently—"have about as much sense as a pretty,

soft, juicy peach. Most people like peaches. Humph! You"—here the finger was aimed at Basil—"are a hothouse plant, a dreamer. Humph!"

She looked Toni over and nodded her head. "Humph! You are a prickly little chestnut. Humph!"

Her finger pointed directly towards the tip of Toni's nose.

"There's something wrong with my nose," thought Toni in wild alarm; and she looked down to see what the trouble was.

"Good heavens! Are you cross-eyed?" ejaculated Aunt Priscilla.

"N-n-no!" stammered Toni, and her eyes lifted their gaze from her nose. "I thought there was something on my nose; a smudge—or something."

Mrs. Omar Khayyam began to scratch and mew in her basket.

"What's that?" exclaimed Aunt Priscilla.

"It's our Cersian pat—I mean our Persian cat," explained Cecily.

"Yes," added Toni, stooping to open the basket, "this is Mrs. Omar Khayyam; and she is a beauty."

Mrs. Omar stepped out with great dignity. She gazed about the room with an air of calm delibera-

tion. Then she stretched herself and gave a prodigious yawn. To the astonishment of the three children, Mrs. Omar coolly walked across the room and leaped up to Aunt Priscilla's lap. She nestled among the folds of the ugly gray rug and began to purr her song of peaceful satisfaction.

Aunt Priscilla gave a little start, and then reached with her thin hands and stroked the fluffy fur.

"Humph!" she grunted; and Mrs. Omar's purring swelled into a fortissimo, proclaiming that Her Persian Majesty was entirely satisfied with her surroundings.

The door opened, and a tall, thin woman, another Gray Lady, entered. She gave a little movement of surprise when she saw the children; but her face quickly assumed its dull expression of apathy. She shook hands with them limply; "like a sick monkey," as Toni afterwards described it. Her voice was a dull monotone, and she had a peculiar habit of pausing before the last word of her sentences. Sometimes the sentences remained unfinished, as if the slowness of her speech had exhausted all her breath and she *thought* the last word instead of uttering it.

"You were not expected until this—afternoon. The letter to my brother said —— Your rooms

are ready, and I will show you—up-stairs. *A cat!*” Here another gleam of life shone through the dullness of her countenance. “My brother will be—— He loathes—cats.”

“Humph!” came from Aunt Priscilla.

As they followed Aunt Olivia from the room Toni turned and saw Aunt Priscilla beckoning to her. She ran over to her aunt’s chair.

“If there’s any trouble about the cat, you’ll hear from me. Humph!”

Toni nodded with a quick bright smile and hurried after the others.

“We don’t use the front part of the—house,” observed Aunt Olivia as they ascended the stairs. “It is—a large—place. We have—only one woman and a man—to do the—work. My brother says—you two girls—will have to look after your own—room.”

They entered a large, cheerless bedroom with a dark oak wainscoting running round it. The high four-poster, the bureau, and wash-stand were of choice mahogany. Some stiff, straight-backed chairs upholstered in gray rep, and a large, clumsy armchair completed the furnishings. Two windows opened on a balcony overlooking the sea. Wood was laid, ready for a fire in the grate, and a box of logs stood near.

There were three open doors leading into clothes-closets, which seemed like vast, yawning caverns of darkness.

Aunt Olivia turned to Basil. "This is your—room. And this door leads into ——" she added to the girls.

The second room was larger than Basil's, and there were two small beds covered with old-fashioned patchwork quilts. There was the same gloomy wainscoting, with the dismal gray kalsomin-ing above it. A mantelpiece, twin to that in Basil's room, was part of the intervening wall, and showed that both grates shared the same chimney. This corner room had large windows on two sides, giving a wonderful outlook across the ocean.

Aunt Olivia drew aside a curtain and looked out with a far-off gaze. After a moment she turned towards them and said half-dreamily, as if unconsciously musing aloud, "The sea is like life—vast, mysterious, and—gray." The last word was uttered with a visible effort.

She crossed the room and opened a door leading into the hall. Reverting to her apathetic tones, she told them in clipped-off sentences that the bathroom was around the first turning; and that dinner would be ready very soon. With that she disappeared and the door closed gently behind her.

"Humph!" ejaculated Toni; and she sat down with a thump in a creaking rocking-chair.

Basil stood smiling in the connecting doorway, and Cecily began to remove her hat.

" 'I'm aweary, I'm aweary, I would that I were dead,' " groaned Toni to an accompaniment of rumbles and creaks as she rocked to and fro.

She tossed her brown beaver hat over to the bed. Her gloves followed and fell upon the floor; and she slipped her coat off, over the back of the chair she occupied.

Basil went over to the window. "The sea may be like life, as Aunt Olivia said; but I think it is like a huge pot of gray soup, or, I suppose I should say—*gravy*," he said.

"It's gray dye!" cried Toni. "And everything in this dreary place has been dipped in it and dyed gray, *gray*, GRAY! Those marble mantelpieces are like tombstones that have lost themselves on their way to the churchyard and have wandered into the house by mistake. Those big, dark cupboards are vaults where all our buried ancestors lie—festering in their shrouds. Ugh!"

She joined Basil at the window.

"Oh, you dreary sea!" she said, shaking her fist. "Gray sky, gray sea, gray rocks, gray world, gray life!"

"We'll be getting a gray mold on ourselves if you talk like that any longer, Toni," laughed Basil. "I'm going to light your fire, girls, and get some cheer into this room."

The flames began to crackle with the merry sound of tiny hands clapping, and soon a ruddy glow of cheerful warmth spread over the room.

"At any rate, we are well supplied with wood," observed Cecily, glancing into the box which stood near the grate, and which was painted gray, in imitation of the marble.

Toni went over to the bureau and began to brush her hair with energetic strokes. Cecily had already set out their combs and brushes on the shining mahogany, which was protected with a white cover edged with knitted lace.

Toni gave a half-suppressed shriek. "Look at me! Look at me! I'm actually turning gray! I'm moldy already!"

The mirror was misty with dampness, and Toni's dim reflection gave her face a gray tinge. She seized her hand-mirror and rushed over to the fire.

"Oh, I'm brown after all!" she sighed contentedly as she looked at herself with the rosy firelight playing upon her olive skin.

"Shall we go down-stairs now?" suggested Cecily.

Toni scrambled up from the rug. "Now for Grandfather! He'll be a gray ogre, I suppose."

Aunt Olivia met them at the foot of the stairs. She led them to the living-room, where a long table, concealed by a shining white cloth, was set with willow-pattern china and quaint, massive silver. A cheerful fire burned in the grate, and the mantel-shelf was supported by figures with hideous grinning faces carved in black marble. The fire-light seemed to play hide-and-seek about the room, and sometimes lurked in a long mirror between two windows; then, flitting over the silver on the table, it wandered behind the dull gilt frames of the old paintings which adorned the walls.

There were several rows of well-filled bookshelves at one end of the room, and a table stood near, with writing-materials, a work-basket, and magazines on it.

Four plates of steaming soup were on the dinner-table, and the children seated themselves as Aunt Olivia's gesture indicated.

"Where's Grandfather?" Toni's interrogative glance said to the others.

No one spoke. Toni crushed Cecily's incipient giggle with a frown. The oppressive silence was unbroken, except for the crepitating noise of the flames.

Presently the servant came in to remove the plates. She was a thick-set woman, with a drooping mouth and peculiar elevated eyebrows, so that her face had a continual expression of interrogation. Black down shadowed her upper lip. Aunt Olivia addressed her by the name of Delia.

Delia had evidently refused to be influenced by the grayness of her surroundings, for her clothes were a mixture of colors that would have done credit to the multi-colored garment of the biblical Joseph. Her orange blouse was ornamented at the neck with a bright red tie, and it glared at her Oxford-blue skirt over the fence of a high green belt which was fastened with gilt buttons.

The soup, which, like a much-advertised English cocoa, was grateful and comforting, was followed by baked fish and potatoes. Then came dessert—pancakes! Toni could not repress a funny little chuckle as Aunt Olivia raised the cover from the dish which Delia placed before her.

“Did you—speak?” asked Aunt Olivia.

The children looked at each other. Aunt Olivia paused and waited expectantly for a reply.

“We—we—just *love* pancakes!” burst out Toni in desperation.

Basil’s crutch, which was propped against his chair, fell with a crash to the floor and he reached

down to get it, hiding his laughing face from their view. Cecily choked and spluttered. Aunt Olivia, quite unperturbed, helped them liberally to pancakes, and they ate in solemn silence, though Cecily glared at Toni with each mouthful.

Aunt Olivia rose at the end of the meal. "At four o'clock my brother wishes to see—you. Not together—the youngest one first." She left the room.

"Whatever made you say we liked pancakes?" questioned Cecily indignantly.

"I don't know. Some one had to say something, so I said it," replied Toni. "My brain is turning—I'm going crazy. Never mention pancakes to me again! I loathe them more than you do."

The black marble clock, with a bronze lion reposing on the top, chimed the half-hour from the mantelpiece.

"Twelve-thirty. What are you girls going to do between now and four?"

"Let's go for a walk along the shore, Cecily. It will be exciting. Come on," coaxed Toni.

"I suppose we might as well do that as anything," Cecily answered in dubious tones.

"I wish I could go with you." Basil's voice was regretful. "I'll hunt up a book from these shelves."

“Good luck to you,” laughed Toni. “I imagine you’ll find them filled with books like ‘Anatomy of Melancholy,’ Fox’s ‘Book of Martyrs,’ Somebody’s dreary ‘Meditations on Life,’ and others of a similar cheerful nature.”

“Dickens!” cried Basil with the joyous tones of a shipwrecked sailor seeing land after drifting hopelessly for days. “Here’s ‘Martin Chuzzlewit’! Now for Martin; and when you come home you will find me a regular Mark Tapley for being jolly!”

The girls put on their hats and coats and hurried out. A winding path led them to the edge of the cliff, and there they found a primitive stairway descending to the rocky shore.

Toni clapped her hands. “Let us go this way, where it is rugged and bleak. If we go round the point, we shall find ourselves in the cove.”

A cold, wet wind blew in their faces, and the waves leaped over the rocks with terrific force, throwing showers of spray over their heads, and then receding with a crunching, grinding rattle of loose pebbles and stones. They could see nothing but the fog and the spray-crested waves, which resembled the open jaws of an angry animal showing fierce white teeth. Even the cliff from which they had descended was hidden. They climbed to the top of an immense rock, where the spray could not

reach them, and there they laughed at the furious waves dashing with wild roars against their fortress.

Occasionally sea-gulls would swoop through the gloom and disappear with shrill cries, and far away they heard the mournful sound of a bell-buoy, ringing its seemingly eternal knell for the many who will lie in their coral graves "until the sea gives up its dead."

Toni, with her arms extended, stood up and drew in deep breaths of the salty air.

"Oh, it's wonderful!" she cried. "The magic of the sea! I feel it; it has won my love. My heart feels like a bird; it longs to fly through the mist with the gulls. Ooh! look at that one!" she pointed to a wave whose curving height resembled the poise of a rearing horse. On it came, with a roaring growl, and threw itself upon the rock where they stood, in a frenzy of futile effort. Spray, shells, and pebbles were tossed high in the air and fell back, to be tossed again and again, the playthings of the waves.

They sat there for a long time, fascinated by the spell of the sea, and exclaiming with shrill delight as the waves rolled in. Then Cecily shivered and complained of the cold.

"It must be time to go back," she said, and began to climb down from their throne.



“O WIND OF THE SEA! TAKE A THOUGHT-MESSAGE FROM ME TO DAD!
BLOW SOFTLY AND WHISPER IN HIS EARS THAT I LOVE HIM —
I LOVE HIM, AND TRUST HIM!” — *Page 73.*

Toni stood for a moment with eyes closed. "O wind of the sea! Take a thought-message from me to Dad! Blow softly and whisper in his ears that I love him—I love him, and trust him!"

When they returned to the house they found that Jim Trefethen had brought their trunks.

"We must change our dresses and look as nice as we can when we go to see Grandfather," observed Cecily, beginning to unpack at once.

"Sure-lee!" replied Toni. "Here's my brown velvet. Dad always liked me in that."

"These rooms won't look half bad when we get our little pictures and books scattered about," called Basil from his room.

Shortly before four o'clock they went down to the living-room, Cecily being the only one who was visibly nervous, though the others quaked inwardly over the impending interview.

Cecily looked very pretty in her blue velvet dress, whose lustrous color seemed to deepen the shade of her eyes, and her plump cheeks were flushed with nervous excitement.

When the clock struck four, Aunt Olivia appeared. "You had better go—now, Cecily," she said. "The front hall—the second door at the—right is my brother's—study."

She left them, and Cecily, with a wild, despair-

ing look at the others, went the way her aunt had indicated.

“Let’s time her,” said Basil, looking at the clock.

“Into the jaws of death,” said Toni with a sepulchral voice. “Why didn’t I make my will? I know I’ll never survive! If I *do* live through this, you’ll never hear me complain of having my picture taken or my teeth pulled! I’ll be blissful and contented, whatever my lot.”

“It’s confoundedly unpleasant, this being inspected. The sight of my crutch will condemn me in Grandfather’s eyes, I know.” Basil gritted his teeth.

“Seventeen minutes!” announced Toni, as they heard their sister coming along the hall.

“He’s awful!” gasped Cecily with tear-filled eyes. “He’s a trute and a byrant—I mean a brute and a tyrant. I could scarcely speak, I was so frightened. He said you were to go next, Basil; for he couldn’t stand two girls in succession.”

“My turn next!” Basil gave the girls a queer little wistful smile and hobbled from the room.

Cecily settled down for a good cry, and Toni paced up and down the room.

“His wrath will accumulate with each interview, and I’ll get the worst of it. It’s simply awful to have long legs like mine when one is shaking with

fear. My knees feel like loose hinges! I'm hollow—I'm a mere shell. Why *didn't* I throw myself to the hungry, devouring waves when I stood on that high rock? Oh, if I could lose my temper! I'm always brave when I lose my temper; but now I feel as meek and saintly as a whitewashed angel. I'm a wilted lily—drooping, sagging, on a broken stem!"

CHAPTER VI

THE BATTLE OF HASTINGS

TWENTY minutes had ticked away before they heard the soft tap of Basil's rubber-shod crutch on the hall floor. When he entered the room he was no longer pale. There was an angry gleam in his eyes, which accounted for the glow on his usually white cheeks.

"M-mm-must I go now?" wailed Toni.

Basil nodded. "I think I got the worst of it. I feel like a worm that's been stepped on. It may be easy for you. Buck up, old girl! Don't get flustered."

"I can't b-b-buck up. I feel like a melting snowflake. My tongue is swelling, my throat's closing up, my heart's exploding. I—I—I'm going to *bust!*" Toni rushed out of the room.

"What did he say to you?" asked Cecily, wiping her eyes.

"Never mind what he said," replied Basil, sinking into a chair. "It's the way he says things that hurts. His voice is like a knife—just like those

slicing-machines they use in butcher-shops for cutting bacon. I feel as if my soul had been sliced to pieces."

Toni went towards her grandfather's door. Her feet seemed weighted with lead, and she could almost hear her heart thumping against her ribs. She raised her arm, intending to give a timid knock, but her hand came against the door with a resounding whack. She jumped back, aghast and trembling. There was a moment's pause, pregnant with horror. A voice came from the room in cold, steely tones.

"Come in."

Toni entered. She felt as if she were engulfed by the roaring waves she had been watching, and with a horrible sinking sensation she struggled towards a figure she saw seated by the fire on the opposite side of the room.

Suddenly she heard her own voice saying in cheerful accents: "How do you do, Grandfather? I am so glad to know you at last!"

This brought her to her senses, and she found herself shaking hands with an old man whose thin lips were curved with a peculiar smile; while a gleam of sardonic humor glittered in his piercing gray eyes. He pointed to a chair and she gladly sat down, for her knees were weakening again, and

the floor seemed to be rising up like a towering mountain and then sinking into an abysmal depth.

He sat with his elbows resting on the arms of his chair, with the fingers of his right hand touching those of his left. His thin white face was smooth-shaven, and a protruding under-lip gave it a sinister expression as he nodded his head slowly above the lattice-work of his long fingers. He wore a black velvet coat, and on his head was a black silk cap which fitted snugly over his thick white hair. His tall form seemed pitifully thin and shrunken as he sat in the large winged-chair; and Toni, meeting his gaze fearlessly, felt a little quiver of tender feeling in her heart towards the old man.

"He's old, mean, and unhappy," she thought. "No one apparently loves him. That is what's the matter, though he doesn't realize it."

"So you are glad to know your grandfather? Your brother and sister didn't seem to relish the opportunity of making my acquaintance." His voice was tinged with a sneer.

Toni started. "To tell you the truth, Grandfather, I was so frightened when I entered the room that I didn't know what I was saying. I wasn't really glad to meet you then, but I believe I am now."

“To what may I attribute your change of feeling towards me?”

Their eyes met and flashed like sharp lances. Toni was no longer nervous.

“I like meeting strange people,—it is like reading new books; and you look clever and interesting, Grandfather. Talking with you will be like turning over the pages of a book I haven’t read. I find that people are just as interesting as books, don’t you, Grandfather? But I suppose you don’t care about people because you keep to yourself so much, which will make you all the more interesting to me. You will be different.”

He reached to the table beside him for his pipe, and slowly filled it with choice tobacco from a curious oriental jar. Toni’s quick eyes had seen the silver match-box just out of his reach. She sprang up and struck a match.

“Do let me light your pipe for you! I always did it for Dad.”

She held the match over the bowl of his pipe, and he puffed until the tobacco ignited and sent forth a pleasant aroma.

“Thank you. Your name is ——?” he paused.

She made a playful little curtsy. “Antoinette—but I am Toni, at your service.”

“Antoinette!” he repeated. The murmur came

through the curls of fragrant smoke, and the speaker glanced up at a thick brocaded curtain which hung on the wall above the fireplace. Through the rich green folds could be seen the outline of a large frame enclosing a picture hidden behind the curtain.

Toni, seeing his abstracted gaze, fell into a reverie as she looked into the glowing coals. The study began to gloom with the shadows of an early twilight. Flames chased each other over the surface of the log and curled about the huge protruding knots. The spiral rings of smoke ascending from Mr. Hastings's pipe fluttered and faded away like little memory-ghosts, fantastic shapings of their thoughts as they sat in silence before the fire.

"Well!" said a querulous voice. "Have you been suddenly struck dumb? Don't sit there like a staring idiot! Say something!"

"Oh!" Toni jumped. "Say something? Oh, yes! I—I—er—I *have awfully long legs!*"

She made this wild assertion with an air of solemn importance which she might have used in announcing that she was the Queen of Sheba. Her grandfather, enjoying her embarrassment, began to laugh. At first it was a peculiar sound, as if the laugh had grown rusty from disuse; but Toni soon made a duet of it with her rippling chuckles. Then

the fire added its crackle, and the log popped and sent a galaxy of sparks sky-rocketing up the chimney. Mr. Hastings's laugh suddenly grew shy and retired into the shelter of a cough.

"Your information is exceedingly interesting," he observed; "most delightful, refreshing, and really remarkable. You must be a genius!"

"Basil is the genius of our family," began Toni. "He plays the piano wonderfully. If he were only strong enough he'd be a Hoffmann or a Paderewski. Oh, you must hear him play!"

"Piano-playing, as I told Basil, is only fit for women and girls," said Mr. Hastings, resuming his cold, incisive tones. "Though I suppose it might be suitable for a cripple, who will never amount to anything."

"How dare you speak like that?" stormed Toni, rising to the full height of her long legs.

"Sit down, my dear child, or your head will bump the ceiling! Sit down," he insisted.

"I don't suppose you realized how cruel and heartless your words were; but you have no right to sneer at Basil's misfortune. He didn't choose to be a cripple."

"Of course not, of course not! Don't let your temper splutter so, my little volcano. It's a pity your brother and sister haven't some of your fire.

You could spare it. You seem to have an abominable temper."

"It's the real Hastings temper, I am told." She hurled this remark at him with an indignant toss of the head.

"So? Well, I trust you will not place the Hastings temper, as you call it, on exhibition at the Academy. You and Cecily are to begin your studies there next Monday. Cecily seems a cheerful little nonentity. How does it happen that you alone seem to have any spirit? Of course, Basil's physical infirmity precludes him from sharing it, but Cecily might have acquired some of it, if only through having been forced to live with you." He gave her a quizzical glance, half hoping to see another flash of temper.

"Humph!" was Toni's only reply.

"I see it will be impossible for Basil to go to the Academy," mused Mr. Hastings aloud. "And he needs regular instruction badly. He appears to be a perfect idiot so far as mathematics are concerned. He will have to brush up, and I'll have him taught bookkeeping. That is about the only career open to him, though I don't suppose he will welcome the change from a piano-stool to a seat in an office. Remember, you will all have to earn your living some day, and I intend you to prepare for it now.

I will have no drones here. And don't let yourselves be possessed with the idea that you will inherit my money. John Hamilton's children shall not have a penny of mine after my death. I shall leave my wealth to various charities."

"That's what uncharitable persons usually do," responded Toni. "We don't want your money; and we don't care what you do with it. If you want to endow a college for cats or found a hospital for decrepit mosquitoes, it's no affair of ours."

"Ah! I am glad to see that you are so reasonable. Now, if you want to be a stenographer and typist, I'll send you to a business college after you are graduated from the Academy. Cecily informed me with a giggle that her spelling was weak, and that she thought she wouldn't care to be a stenographer. She would prefer to get married or go to Italy and study singing! She sings and Basil plays. What extraordinary talent have you to contribute to the honor of the Hastings family?"

"I haven't any talent. I'm just an ordinary person, being a true Hastings; but I can spell."

"So? You can spell? Then I presume that stenography and typewriting appeal to you?" he sneered.

Toni gazed at him with half-closed eyes. "If learning stenography and typewriting will enable

me to go away from here and earn my living, I will gladly accept your offer to send me to a business college. I am only sorry that I have to wait until I am through the Academy. I hate to be dependent on you!"

Her words were uttered with a cold deliberation, and she unconsciously imitated her grandfather's tones, so that the resemblance between the girlish voice and that of the old man would have been startling to the ears of a listener, had there been one.

Mr. Hastings, looking at her cold, set face, was possessed with an unholy desire to see her passion flame up again. With the cunning of a spider torturing a fly, he seized upon an idea which was heartless and cruel.

"You understand that you are to be known by the name of Hastings?"

Toni nodded with compressed lips.

The taunting voice went on: "No matter how proficient a girl becomes as a stenographer, she would find it extremely difficult to secure a position if it were known that she was the daughter of a thief."

Silence! The fire in the grate had ceased flaming, and the log was a glowing mass of coals. Toni stood up and faced her grandfather. He did not

see the flare of impotent fury, as he had hoped. She was calm, unnaturally so.

"You are a cruel, wicked old man!" she hissed between her teeth. "No wonder no one loves you! Whatever you and the world may think, I *know* my father is not a thief. I trust him. But even if he were dishonest, I should love him with a love, a loyalty, that you have never been able to gain from any one. I'm proud of my father."

There was a momentary break in her voice as she continued: "I love my father, and I won't allow you to call him a thief. He is the victim of some awful mistake; but it must be cleared away and explained some day. I know it will! What a hideous, mean, twisted soul you must have when it prompts you to use my sorrow as a means of torturing me! Why are you pitting yourself against me? I am only a girl! And you have lived all these years in the world without having learned to be kind!"

The glow of the coals died away slowly, like fading rose-petals.

"I almost believe I am sorry for you, so I can't really hate you as I want to do. No, I won't hate you, for hatred soils the soul. But if you torture me too much, you old Spanish Inquisitioner, I'll run away!"

She stumbled over to the door, and, opening it, turned and fired her parting shot. "I'll run away! And—I have awfully long legs!"

The door closed with a bang. One by one, the dead coals dropped through the bars of the grate.

The lonely old man sat in the deepening dusk, silent and thoughtful. The burning tobacco in his pipe gleamed and faded, and gleamed again. Fluttering memories leaped up in his mind, glowed for a moment, and died away.

He looked up to the curtain over the fireplace. "Antoinette!" he murmured; and by the mystic illusion of imagination he saw the picture which had been concealed by the curtains for many years. It was a portrait of his wife, the French Antoinette of long ago, who, despite her wondrous beauty, was strangely like the gawky, brown elf, Toni—the third Antoinette to defy him.

He rose with a slight shiver and shook the tobacco ashes from his pipe into the grate. Aunt Olivia knocked at the door and timidly announced that supper was ready.



"I SHOULD LOVE HIM WITH A LOVE, A LOYALTY, THAT YOU HAVE NEVER BEEN ABLE TO GAIN FROM ANY ONE. I'M PROUD OF MY FATHER." — *Page 85.*

CHAPTER VII

A RAINBOW OF FAITH AND A HEART OF GOLD

IT was a charming old gentleman who sat at the head of the table and dispensed the regulation Saturday supper-dish in Maine—pork and beans. Pork and beans cooked in the good old-fashioned New England way! What a steaming, savory joy they are, after a day of cold rain and dreary fog, when the waves and the wind are warring outside against the rocky battlements of the Maine coast! When pork and beans are combined with the cylindrical loaves of Boston brown-bread, one must, perforce, think of Oliver Twist's immortal request.

The children were bewildered at the change in their grandfather, as they listened to his conversation, which was courteous and affable, and contained no hint of the sneering sarcasm he had shown them during the unfortunate interviews which Toni had recorded in her memory as "The Battle of Hastings." He was now exceedingly punctilious with her, though she was not as responsive as the others to his friendly overtures. Aunt Olivia talked but little, in her peculiar disjointed way.

Several times during the meal Toni, who sat at Mr. Hastings's right, reached out with her long leg under the table and tapped Cecily's toe. Cecily sat exactly opposite, and it was an easy feat for Toni's lanky leg to reach across.

Some years before, when they were taught by a governess at home, they had established a secret code of communication during lessons by a system of toe-tapping. Toni, in her surprise over her grandfather's friendly attitude towards them, now began to converse with her sister in the old way. They had not used the system for a long time, and Cecily had evidently forgotten some of the signals, for her taps and pressures were somewhat irregular. Sometimes she used just a little more weight than was necessary. Indeed, once she kept her foot pressed on Toni's and held it in painful imprisonment for several minutes. Toni winced, but Cecily went on calmly eating brown-bread; and when Toni, after sundry squirms and coughs succeeded in catching her eye, Cecily gazed back at her imploring face in puzzled amazement. At last the poor foot was released and Toni withdrew it to the shelter of her chair.

Just as they rose from the table, Mr. Hastings turned to her with a courtly air. "It was exceedingly gracious of you, Toni, to initiate me into the

mysteries of your under-the-table method of communication. I am sure I shall find it very interesting when you have been kind enough to enlighten me as to the meaning of the code."

Toni stared, wide-eyed, with horrified astonishment. "W-w-was it *you*?"

Her grandfather bowed. Toni felt herself shrinking into the size of the last lonely bean left on her plate; and she stood speechless as Mr. Hastings left the room.

"My sister—would like—to see—you before you go—up-stairs," Aunt Olivia informed them.

They went at once to Aunt Priscilla's room, which was warmed and brightened by a cheerful fire. Under the glow of the flames and the shaded reading-lamp, the gray room did not seem so dismal.

Mrs. Omar was on the table near Aunt Priscilla's chair, calmly reposing on an open magazine which Miss Priscilla had been reading before Delia brought in her supper tray. There was a half-perused article in the magazine which the invalid was anxious to finish; but she had not the heart to disturb the beautiful animal, and continued to sit in silence, listening to the purring music of Mrs. Omar's slumber song.

It was a long, long time since anything or any-

body had shown a preference for Miss Priscilla, as Mrs. Omar had done that morning; and Miss Priscilla rather liked it.

The children did not stay in the room long. Mrs. Omar roused herself and made them welcome by rubbing against their legs. Aunt Priscilla scarcely spoke, beyond adding "Humphs" to their remarks.

"I'm so glad that you like Mrs. Omar, Aunt Priscilla," said Toni.

"Humph!" was the response as the cat jumped up to her lap. "Leave her here with me—safe here."

When they left, Aunt Priscilla resumed her reading, and a short time afterwards she laid down her magazine. Mrs. Omar looked up with shining green eyes.

"I believe I could like those children," observed the Gray Lady. "Humph!"

"Hurr-urr-umphrrrr!" answered Mrs. Omar, and she hid the gleam of her right eye with a wink of wise understanding.

Unaccustomed to the sound of the sea, the children slept fitfully that night.

"The ocean sounds like a roaring dragon coming to devour us," shuddered Cecily.

"I'll be St. George and rescue you, fair

maidens," called out Basil through the connecting door, which had been left open.

"The waves seem to be crawling nearer and nearer. I am sure we shall be washed away and float over the sea like three cakes of Ivory soap," Toni murmured sleepily, and she snuggled under the thick, gray, homespun blankets.

She was the first to waken the next morning. With a little cry of joy, she sprang out of bed and ran over to the window.

"Oh, the sun is shining, and the ocean is blue, the most wonderful greeny-blue, shimmering in the sunlight! And there are islands, evergreen islands—two of them. The sky is the bluest blue you ever saw. Oh, wonderful!"

Cecily and Toni accompanied Aunt Olivia to church, the little gray stone building they had passed the day before on their way from the station. The churchyard was enclosed with a brown picket-fence, and sloped down to the shore.

"What a peaceful place for the dead!" thought Toni, as they passed along the path which took a winding course among the graves to the church-door.

There was a beautiful charm about the simple edifice. Over the altar was a stained-glass window which had been brought from Italy and given to the

church by Toni's grandfather. The other windows were cheap, but their leaded panes were of frosted glass, with simple borders of soft, neutral greens, browns, and dull rose. The walls were finished with a rough plaster of ecru, and the heavy beams and panelings were stained dark brown.

Toni soon lost herself under the spell of the service. The mysterious murmur of the sea reached her ears and seemed like whispers of the dead outside, as though they were taking part in the responses.

In the afternoon Cecily and Basil looked over some of Aunt Priscilla's magazines. Toni went along the shore with a thick rug and ensconced herself in a sheltered corner among the rocks. With a writing-pad propped on her knees, she wrote to her father.

By the Sea.

MY DEAREST OF ALL DEAR DADDIES:

Behold your Toni seated on the coast of Maine, with waves rolling in and almost touching her toes! And funny crawling things all around, shells, crabs, clams, lobsters, whales, and sea-serpents! And there are rocks everywhere, great towers and castles. Oh, it is wonderful!

There's the ocean, all crinkly with waves that are dancing and showing their white-frilled petticoats, kicking their spray-laces high in the air. One wave

has just left a piece of lace near me,—a little curved line of bubbles and froth.

Far over the sea sail-boats skim along, some with sails of gleaming white, and others with gray, brown, yellow, and queer pink. Sea-gulls are flying about, like scraps of paper scattered by the wind.

Then there's the sky—blue, blue, blue! Great billowy masses of clouds pile themselves up like snowy Alps, and then they dissolve and float away in wisps of torn gossamer.

There's the wind. What a giant fellow he is! He is trying to pick me up and carry me off to his wild home in the far, white North. If only he would carry me to you, my dear old Daddy, I should let him take me in his arms and drift with the broken clouds to the place where I have left my heart.

Now that I have met Grandfather, I recognize myself as all Hastings. I see where my awful temper comes from. He is odd and queer, but I believe I could like him a little. I'm odd and queer myself. Anyway, I'm going to try, though I know it will be a struggle. Except for a regular morning and afternoon stroll in the garden, he spends all his time in his study, a wonder-room filled with antiques and books and treasures from far-away lands and times. He is writing some sawdusty, ponderous book on "Ancient Religions of the World," so Aunt Priscilla says.

Aunt Priscilla is peculiar. Her conversation bristles with "Humphs." What an expressive word "Humph" is! I have adopted it for fre-

quent use when I collide with Grandfather. One can pour forth a torrent of scorn in a "Humph." And again, it can be a contemptuous puff of unconcern.

But, to return to Aunt Priscilla. She has taken Mrs. Omar under her protection, which is fortunate for our "harmless, necessary cat," as Grandfather hates all feline creatures—women being included in that category. Mrs. Omar has fallen violently in love with Aunt Priscilla, thus proving that there is something very good under Aunt Priscilla's outside prickles. I think I'll call her "Aunt Prix."

Aunt Olivia is like an old letter written with faded ink. I am going to try to decipher the writing, but it is pale and dim; and there doesn't seem to be one legible word to use as a clue.

Now for Delia, the woman who does the work! Delightful Delia, Delia the Doleful, Delia the Dumb! I haven't heard her utter a word since we came into the house. She is a wonder! Everything here seems to have run to gray: curtains, cushions, carpets, walls, floors, ceilings, mirrors, people, and *life*. But Delia, in silent rebellion against the prevailing color of things, flaunts banners (meaning her clothes) that are dazzling in their bewildering radiance. Delia's Dresses are a Dream! (Wouldn't that make a good title for a comic song?)

Delia has three eyebrows; but as she has only two eyes, the third eyebrow has very obligingly condescended to adorn her upper lip. The two above have almost succeeded in making both ends meet—over her nose.

Delia's father is Grandfather's chore-boy. He has worked on the place since he was twelve; but he is still The Boy. His real name is Cæsar Silas Hupper. Most of his hair is off the top of his head, and has apparently wandered down to his chin, where it flourishes in a beard that is like a grizzly cataract. He speaks as if each word weighed a ton, and he is as solemn as a tombstone.

Every one here seems to be old. By next month I shall probably be a centenarian myself.

O Daddy dear! here I am rattling away at all sorts of nonsense and I haven't said what I want to say most of all: I believe in you, love you, *always!* I know you are innocent, Dad! Nothing can ever make me lose faith in you.

Life is full of snarls and worries now. The future seems like a tangled skein of to-morrows. Perhaps, Daddy dear, if we keep on loving and hoping and doing our best, we shall be able to unravel the tangled threads and everything will be set right. I am going to hope for that.

Let my faith in you brighten the dark clouds of your life with rainbow glory. At the end of faith's rainbow is a heart of gold—Rainbow Gold, the love of

TONI.

CHAPTER VIII

ALEXANDER THE GREAT

THE next day Cecily and Toni went to the Academy, and after an interview with Mr. Gifford, the principal, they were assigned to their classes.

For a town the size of Peacedale the Academy was a remarkable school. Many of its scholars came from outlying farms and neighboring villages. At this time the Academy was fortunate in having John Gifford as principal. Young, enthusiastic, and clever, he spurred his students on to eager effort; and his assistant teachers, catching his enthusiasm, willingly laid aside their obsolete methods. Thus the Academy was completely revolutionized and became known as one of the best preparatory schools in the State.

The two girls soon adapted themselves to the everyday life at their grandfather's house. Attending school every day, and their study-hours at home, gave them little free time.

For a few days Basil moped by himself. The boy was lost without a piano, for he was accustomed to spending many hours in practising each day.

He did some composing, but became discouraged, and one morning he threw his manuscripts into the fire with a muttered, "What's the use?"

It was a beautiful day, with a warm glow in the air, as if the sun had forgotten that summer was over. Poor Basil longed to go out along the beach, but his infirmity kept him a prisoner within the garden.

"If I could only see Mrs. Omar," he thought. "I'll go and call on her, even if Aunt Priscilla does bite my head off."

He crossed the hall from the living-room and knocked gently on Aunt Priscilla's door.

"Come in," called his aunt.

He obeyed and closed the door behind him.

"Humph! It's good to see that some one is alive!"

"That's how I feel, Aunt Priscilla. I haven't spoken to a soul since breakfast. May I stay with you for a while?"

"Humph! Stay if you like; but talk, talk, *talk!*"

Basil talked. Aunt Priscilla leaned back in her chair with closed eyes, but her "Humphs" showed that she was following the conversation with interest. Basil told about his home in the South, and mentioned Jean.

“Humph! Scotch—smart woman!”

“She told us all about the fire in your room when Mother ran off with Dad,” laughed the boy.

“Humph! Rug burnt!” she pointed to a large mended place in the rug.

Then Basil spoke of his music, and what a trial it was to be without a piano.

“Humph! Piano! I haven’t heard one since your grandmother left. She played; but your grandfather would never let Annette, your mother, study music.”

“I wish I had a chance to practise, if only for an hour a day.”

“The piano is up-stairs in the French Antoinette’s room. ’Toinette, she was called.”

“Mrs. Omar used to love my practising, didn’t you, old girl?” he said, caressing Mrs. Omar under the chin. “She always sat on the piano while I practised.”

“Humph! Ask my brother to let you use ’Toinette’s piano. It will be good to hear it again, if he will consent. Humph! Out of tune though.”

Basil sighed. “Grandfather doesn’t like me. He would be sure to refuse. So it’s really no use asking him.”

“Humph! I’ll ask him. I’ll send for him tonight. We haven’t met for weeks. We always dis-

agree. Perhaps the joy of seeing me to-night may induce him to be pleasant for a change. Humph!"

"Oh! Aunt Priscilla, will you really ask him?"

"Humph! Yes, I'll try it. Don't hope for too much."

"Grandmother died in France, didn't she?"

"Yes, she couldn't stand the life here in this bleak place. To bring her here was like expecting a rose to grow at the North Pole. She was very beautiful. Poor little 'Toinette! Humph! When your mother was six years old, 'Toinette packed her things and went away, leaving her husband and child. Your grandfather didn't understand her. He tried to put his butterfly in chains, and she flew away. She died very soon. Poor little 'Toinette! Humph!"

"Did Grandfather mind her going away?"

"It broke his heart. He had one in those days, though he didn't show it. Then he worshiped your mother. All the love he had felt for his wife was lavished on his child. He idolized her; but he was harsh and severe, so that she couldn't stand it either. He wanted to shape her young life according to his cast-iron ideas. So Annette left, too."

"And she was very happy," added Basil. "She was sweet and jolly, just like a girl, until she died four years ago."

“ I saw your father. Humph! Liked him! If Annette had stayed here, she would have faded away without having known any joy in her life. See how Olivia and I have run to seed! Humph!”

That night, after supper, Mr. Hastings went to his sister's room. The interview did not last long, and apparently bore no fruit, for nothing was said about Basil's using the piano up-stairs. For several days Mr. Hastings was more irascible than ever. At the table no one spoke, for he snarled like an angry dog if any one ventured to make a remark; and the meals passed in dreary silence. Even Toni's spirits were crushed.

Basil wasted sheets and sheets of music manuscript-paper composing dirges, requiems, and funeral-marches, which found an ignominious tomb in the waste-paper basket.

Cecily was fortunate in having formed a girlish attachment with Kathryn Lindsay, a girl at the Academy. Life assumed a cheerful aspect for her, because she spent most of her spare time at the rectory, which was Kathryn's home, a happy-go-lucky place where every one was jolly and gay. They read and studied together, and this companionship helped Cecily to throw off the gloomy influence of the Hastings home.

Aunt Olivia went about the house in her slow,

quiet way, looking like a Niobe whose tears had all been exhausted, but whose griefs were still unassuaged.

Delia the Dumb maintained her taciturnity and her brilliancy of apparel. Her appearance was an unceasing delight to the children.

Aunt Priscilla caught a bad cold, and they didn't visit her room for a few days; but when Basil heard that her eyes were affected, he went to her door and asked if he might read aloud to her. She gladly accepted his offer, for she was a voracious reader, and it was hard for her to be denied this one joy of her lonely existence. She had strained her eyes with incessant reading, and she welcomed Basil's suggestion with real delight, which was expressed in a couple of "Humphs" and a nod.

Basil had a good voice and read extremely well; and this was the beginning of many pleasant hours they spent together during the long Maine winter. The plan worked well both ways. It relieved Aunt Priscilla's eyes and was a mental benefit to Basil. She had a keen, alert mind, and she would discuss everything with the boy in a way which was both interesting and instructive. They became great friends, and the brusque, lonely woman soon learned to love the delicate boy, and eagerly awaited his coming every afternoon.

Jim Trefethen came over with his cart and Polly Feemus one afternoon and drove the three children down to his cottage to have supper with Ma.

She welcomed them at the door of the cozy home. Impulsive Toni threw her arms about the sweet little woman whose right cheek was terribly marked with a bright red scar. Her beautiful white hair was drawn low over her forehead, and two curls hung before her ears and partly concealed the cruel marks. Ma's voice was soft and low, and her gray eyes beamed with kindness and good-will.

"Mrs. Trefethen, I'm so glad to meet you!" cried Toni.

"Now, don't say Mrs. Trefethen," broke in Jim. "Ma's Ma; and I'm Jim. There's no Mr. or Mrs. about us."

After taking off their coats and hats in a low-ceilinged bedroom, the girls followed Ma to the parlor across the hall. There they found Basil and Jim with a tall boy of sixteen, whom Jim introduced as Alexander Meredith, adding that some day he would be known as Alexander the Great.

Alexander rose awkwardly and bowed to Cecily, bashfully holding out and withdrawing his large hand, not knowing whether he ought to shake hands with this dainty maiden or not. With a vivid blush that outrivalled the color of his hair, he grasped

courage and Cecily's hand at the same time, making the girl wince with his vehemence, and then dropped the little hand as if he had been burnt.

Toni, pitying the lad's embarrassment, gave him a friendly grasp before he had time to hesitate about repeating the formality with her.

"I think you should be called 'Alexander the Great' now," she said with a flashing smile. "For you have conquered all the classes at the Academy. I watch your daily victories in mathematics with envy."

"Oh, maths. are easy enough," replied the boy.

Ma and Jim left the young people in the parlor; and Toni, in her bright, eager way, soon put Alexander at ease as they all chatted over their lessons and the school library which Mr. Gifford was seeking to establish for the benefit of the Academy.

It was a quaint little room. The floor was covered with a rag carpet whose cotton warp of yellow, red, and green formed vague stripes against the motley of the rags. The walls were kalsomined a pale yellow, and several pictures, enlargements of old-fashioned photographs, in hideous, ornate frames, with an inside border of plush, were hung with stiff regularity. The furniture was of slippery black horsehair. An oval table, marble-topped, held the lamp which lighted the room, and a

large Bible. An organ, with gospel hymn-books resting on its ledge, stood at one end. At the other end was Jim's "Home University," a set of shelves filled with uniform volumes bound in dark red. Looking like a growth of mushrooms on the top of the shelves, was a row of small plaster busts of famous men. Julius Cæsar gazed blankly into the face of Longfellow; Shakespeare rubbed shoulders with Dickens; and Abraham Lincoln turned his back on Bismarck.

Toni learned afterwards that these busts had been obtained with coupons from the wrappings of a certain kitchen-soap. A small, round table, supported by one slender leg with three feet, held a miniature crystal palace which housed and protected a marvelous growth of wax flowers. A large pot of ivy stood near one window, and, after climbing up to the ceiling, the glossy vine had wandered along the walls, forming a beautiful frieze of dark green leaves.

When they went to the dining-room in response to Jim's call, Toni unconsciously detached a tidy from the chair she had been occupying, and carried it with her, dangling from a button of her dress.

The walls of the dining-room were covered with a paper showing a design of blue trellis intertwined with red roses. At the windows were shelves filled

with blossoming plants,—geraniums, fuchsias laden with floral tassels, and calla lilies whose blooms unfurled on their long stems like white banners.

Several pictures hung on the walls. The most conspicuous one was a large chromo representing a dashing damsel in pink. This brilliant affair did double duty as a calendar and an advertisement for a well-known brand of cigars. The pink lady ogled and held out a cigar in the direction of Abraham Lincoln, who hung near-by. On the opposite wall a half-drowned maiden clung to a stone cross rising out of a raging sea; and a few feet away, a pictured angel carried a fat, wakeful child towards a starry sky.

A motto, worked with worsted on perforated cardboard, hung over one door, and asked, in greens and yellows, "What is Home Without a Mother?" Another motto over the door leading into the kitchen replied irrelevantly in pinks and blues, "Eat, Drink, and be Merry," which behest the supper-table seemed to emphasize, for it was laden with tempting viands which bore out Jim's assertion that Ma was the best cook in the State of Maine.

Two plump chickens had been sacrificed for the feast. They were accompanied with a Mont Blanc of mashed potatoes, a pyramid of turnips fluted

with a fork, a quivering monument of red-currant jelly, and a pool of brown gravy steaming in a dish shaped and colored like a mammoth tomato.

"Ummm! it is good not to see or smell a fish!" cried Cecily when they were all seated.

"We have so much fish at home," Toni explained to Ma, "that I expect to turn into a mermaid; and I fear the Atlantic Ocean will be forced to retire from the fish business, for we shall soon exhaust its supply."

"Cæsar Silas has pretty good luck at fishing," observed Jim. "So I suppose you do mostly have what you might call *official* dinners at your place."

"His luck never fails," laughed Basil. "And we have fish nearly every day. When Toni turns into a mermaid I shall probably be a codfish!"

"Fish is supposed to be good brain-food," said Ma.

"Well, I've yet to hear of a fishing district that ever produced a brainy man," rejoined Jim. "Here, Alexander, have some more chicken. It'll make your hair curl!"

Alexander blushed and passed his plate. Toni then followed his example without any urging from Jim.

"How's Aurora Libby's whooping-cough, Ma?" asked Jim as he carved.

"A little better to-day," was the response.

Jim turned to the others. "The Libbys live in that brown house along the road. Aurora is two years old. She's some roarer, is Aurora, and she brings the morn all right. Hasn't failed once since she was born. She greets the morn with a roar long before the roosters think o' crowing."

"I wish you could stay all night, Alexander. I hate to think of your going back so late," said Ma with a kind glance at the boy.

"It's very good of you, but I must do some chores to-night after I get back; and I have to start out to Portland with a load of potatoes at four-thirty to-morrow morning," Alexander replied slowly, and his honest face flushed with bashfulness and gratitude.

"Do you live far from here?" asked Toni.

"About four miles."

"And do you walk into school and back every day?" cried Cecily.

Alexander nodded, "Yes."

As he wielded his knife and fork his rough coat-sleeves slipped up and disclosed the worn cuffs of his shirt, and his thin wrists, which seemed almost too small for his awkward hands. One of his cuffs was fastened with a brass safety-pin; and when he was aware that this makeshift was visible to the

others, the boy hastily dropped his fork, and, with his hands hidden in his lap, tried to pull the refractory coat-sleeves down.

Jim talked incessantly, giving stray bits of news about Peacedale people.

"Jim," said Ma in her soft tones, smiling over the table, "if Polly Feemus had half the speed o' your tongue, she'd beat all the race-horses in the country."

"You're right there, Ma!" agreed Jim as he passed his plate for a second piece of pumpkin pie. "But I guess Steve Fly's wife would beat me at tongue-wagging, in speed and endurance."

"Fly? Is her name really Fly?" said Cecily. "How funny!"

"Fly's her name, and she deserves it. Steve, he's a big, meek giant, with a voice like the squeak of a mouse; but she goes round buzzing like an army o' blue-bottle flies. There's nothing that woman doesn't buzz into, and she carries gossip round as a fly does germs. On the days that she goes out calling there's an epidemic o' bad feeling in the town. I sometimes think that if the old-time ducking o' witches could be revived, it'd be a good thing. And by gum! I'd just like to see that woman ducked into Chandler's Pond!"

"Now, Jim," remonstrated Ma, "who's carrying

a germ of gossip now? Seems to me as if you'd caught some o' Mandy Fly's buzzing."

"By gum! You're right, Ma! I'll quit after one more buzz. I met Dr. Winthrop this afternoon. He says that Hurry-up Simpson is dead."

Jim turned to Toni. "Hurry-up Simpson has been dying for the last three years. He was the slowest man in the state. He warn't no talker like me; he was 'most too lazy to talk. The only thing he was ever heard to say with any real feeling was, 'There's no hurry.' That's how he got the name o' Hurry-up Simpson. He was slow in living and slow in dying. And—will you believe it, Ma?—Dr. Winthrop says his last words were, 'There's no hurry!' It ought to be engraved on his tombstone. And, by gum, I bet that when Gabriel blows his trumpet on the day o' Judgment, Hurry-up will turn over in his grave and say, 'There's no hurry.'"

Alexander had to rush off when supper was over; and Jim took Cecily and Basil to the parlor to show them his "Home University." Toni insisted on helping Ma "do the dishes."

In the bright warm kitchen, which was the pink of neatness, with pots and pans shining like silver, and sturdy geraniums blooming in the white-cur-

tained windows, Toni listened to the story of Alexander.

"He's been an orphan since he was ten," began Ma. "Both his parents were school-teachers, and his father died when the boy was a year old. His mother, a delicate young thing, went on teaching in a district school up-state; and six years ago she died. For a while Alexander was kept by the neighbors, and then he was sent to Joe Barber, who needed a boy to help with the chores. He's been there ever since, and he really does the work of two men, so he can get a chance to come to the Academy."

"He doesn't look very strong," remarked Toni.

"No. Every morning he is up at half-past four, does the milking, chops wood, tends to the stock, and then walks in to school, studying as he comes along the road, if it's light enough. Then when he goes back in the afternoon there's more work and chores, and the evening milking. In the summer he's the best farm-hand ever known. There's nothing that boy doesn't do. And he's the best scholar the Academy ever had. Mr. Gifford wants him to try for a scholarship in some big college; and if he only had more time to study, he'd be sure to win."

"What a terrible existence!" cried Toni. "He's wonderfully clever in everything."

“There’s never a word of grumbling or complaint from Alexander. But I’m kind of worried about him these days. He seems to be outgrowing his strength as well as his clothes. He works too hard, and studies too much, and he doesn’t get enough sleep for a growing boy. And I know the food out at Barber’s isn’t good: pork and griddle-cakes mostly. Jim and I have him here as often as we dare ask him; but Alexander is shy and proud, and it isn’t easy to do things for him. It would hurt him to feel that we noticed, and were trying to help him. So, whenever Jim invites him over to supper, he always asks him to explain something in the University books. Poor Alexander needs friends. The young folks here don’t pay much attention to him. He’s poor and shabby and quiet. And then he’s so shy that they make fun of him. If you could be a bit friendly with him, Toni, it would mean a great deal.”

“Be friendly with him? Indeed I will!” cried Toni.

So a little sunshine came into Alexander’s sordid existence. He had to pass the Hastings place on his way to school, and Cecily and Toni formed the habit of walking in with him from their gate.

“I’m going to call you Lex, instead of Alexander,” said Toni the third time they walked

together. "It sounds more chummy and friendly."

"I should be glad if you would," replied the boy, as he added her books and Cecily's to his own. "That was Mother's name for me."

"And you must call me Toni," she continued, "for we are friends, good friends, you know."

"And don't forget that my name is Cecily, and I'm to be another friend!"

"Thank you, Toni, and—Cecily."

Ma was right when she said that Alexander needed friends. The pupils at the Academy had kept aloof from him more through heedlessness than actual unkindness; and he was too sensitive to make any friendly overtures himself. There was no lingering after school-hours with the many girls and boys. He always had to rush back to the farm. The girls looked askance at his shabby clothes, and the boys made fun of his awkwardness and used to play tricks on him for the sake of adding to his embarrassment. So he avoided the tittering girls and teasing boys, some of whom were jealous of his proficiency in the classes.

When Cecily and Toni showed their liking for Lex the scholars were astounded. That the granddaughters of the richest man in the community should be friendly with this poor, shabby farmer-

boy who had been the butt of their ridicule for years, was an incredible surprise to them. Cecily and Toni never seemed to notice that Lex's trousers were separated from the tops of his coarse, patched shoes by an inch of gray hose; or that his blue sweater was crudely darned with yellow; or that his overcoat was green with age.

Toni had always had a boy chum, and now Lex was beginning to take the place of Jimmie Blake. Cecily, who had the kindest, sweetest heart in the world, was ready to follow Toni's lead; and she admired the friendless boy for his undoubted cleverness and the innate courtesy which underlay his bashful diffidence.

"By gum, Ma!" exclaimed Jim one evening. "It just does my heart good to see Alexander walking from the Academy with those two girls. And it's doing him good, too. I'm glad they came to Peacedale. Alexander has brains and ambition. Now he has young friends, and he'll win!"

One Tuesday night, when Mr. Hastings left the dining-room, Toni followed him into the hall.

"May I visit you in your study for a few minutes, Grandfather?"

He nodded curtly, and held the door open while she passed into the study.

She placed a small log on the fire, which flamed up brightly.

"We needn't light the lamp, need we? The fire-light is so cozy. And may I fill your pipe for you?"

He pushed the tobacco-jar towards her.

"I suppose you always smoke after supper, don't you? I—I wish you would let me come in sometimes. You smoke the same brand that Dad did, and I always used to fill and light his pipe for him. It takes me back to the dear old times to sniff that tobacco now."

She handed him the pipe and struck a match. As the little flame lighted up her face he saw that her dark eyes were misty with unshed tears.

"Umm-umm!" She drew in a deep breath. "That does smell good! I've been aching to get a whiff of that ever since I was in here before."

He did not reply, and she glanced about the study.

"What a wonderful room you have! Those book-shelves look inviting, and that cabinet of curios is a perfect wonder-land of treasures. Some day will you let me come and examine them?"

"Perhaps. I'm not in the habit of letting any one interfere with them. Now will you enlighten me as to the reason of this unexpected visit?"

"Grandfather, I have a new friend at the Academy, such a clever boy, Lex Meredith. May I invite him here to supper some Friday evening, if Aunt Olivia doesn't object?"

Grandfather puffed in ominous silence. "Who is he? I haven't heard of him."

"He lives at Barber's farm, and walks in every day to the Academy. He works very hard and has so little pleasure, and I want him to come here to see Basil. Basil never has a chance to speak to a boy. It's terribly lonely for him, for Cecily and I are away all day."

"At Barber's farm, eh? He's a charity orphan, isn't he?"

Toni's eyes flashed. "He's an orphan, but he earns his living. It isn't a case of charity."

"Ahem! The next thing will be that you will want to entertain all the riff-raff of the town here, and amuse them by allowing them to overhaul my cabinets, I suppose."

Toni sighed and stood up. "Then it is, No?"

"Sit down," he growled. "Tell your Aunt Olivia that your guest will take supper next Friday, if he accepts your invitation. Or shall I have to invite him formally? Beggars are usually proud."

"Oh! may I really ask him?" Toni ignored the sneering remark.

"Yes. Er—pipe's out."

She rekindled the pipe, and then seated herself on a footstool near his chair.

He started. "Antoinette!"

Toni did not hear the whispered exclamation, and she began to chatter about her work at the Academy.

"I'm not so sure about other subjects, but I know positively that I shall have a good report in French," she ended merrily.

"French?" he repeated. "Can you—sing—any French songs?"

"I don't sing as well as Cecily, but I know a few little French songs. Shall I sing them for you?"

"Yes—sing!"

With her hands clasped about her knees, she sang in a sweet, lilting voice some quaint old French songs. He sat back and listened as he gazed into the dancing flames.

"Au clair de la lune,
Mon ami Pierrot
Prêtez-moi ta plume
Pour écrire une mot.
Ma chandelle est morte,
Je n'ai plus de feu ;
Ouvrez-moi ta porte,
Pour l'amour de Dieu!"

She felt a hand laid gently upon her head.

Gradually it slipped to her shoulder, and, still singing, she leaned against his knee, just as she had often done with her father in the dear, joyous days at home. A little sob choked her utterance, and her voice broke.

“ Oh, Grandfather, I’m so lonesome for Daddy!” the words came involuntarily.

He said nothing, but she felt a gentle pressure on her shoulder. She did not know that, years ago, the French Antoinette had cried after singing that song, because she too was lonesome, for her home in sunny France.

Presently Toni stood up. “ I must go and study my lessons now. Good-night, Grandfather; and thank you for letting me invite Lex.”

“ Wait!” he called when she reached the door. He lighted the lamp and opened a drawer of his desk. Taking out a key, he handed it to her.

“ This belongs to the room up-stairs in the south wing. There is a piano there. Tell Olivia to have Delia air and warm the place so that Basil can—practise, if he wishes to do so.”

“ Oh, Grandfather!” she began, but he dismissed her abruptly with an impatient gesture.

“ Run along! run along!”

After she had gone he paced up and down the room in a sort of caged-lion promenade.

"Idiot!" he apostrophized himself. "There'll be no peace in the house. Stranger, piano, noise! It will be unbearable. 'Toinette's piano! Ah! idiot, imbecile, fool that I am!"

He returned to his chair, and, taking his memorandum-pad from the table, inscribed a few words: "Piano-tuner from Portland."

He hurled the pad back to the table.

"I'm in my dotage. I've reached imbecility," he muttered. "That child with her dark eyes has bewitched me. Idiot!"

The fire crackled as if repeating the word, "Idiot, idiot!"

Outside a wailing wind hovered about the house; and a loosened strand of Virginia creeper rapped faintly against the window, as if striving for admittance; like the frail memories that were tapping for entrance into the old man's tightly-closed heart.

CHAPTER IX

DELIA ISSUES AN ULTIMATUM

It seemed to Toni the next morning that her experience in the study with her grandfather was a dream. He usually breakfasted alone, but this morning he joined them in the living-room. He snarled at Aunt Olivia when she handed him his coffee, as if he suspected her of offering him poison. He frowned at Cecily, so that her hand trembled and the rolls fell from the plate she was passing him.

"Bah! awkward creature!" he growled; and Cecily's eyes grew tearful.

Basil was drawn into the whirlpool of ill-humor when he attempted to thank his grandfather for allowing him to practise on the piano up-stairs.

"Bah! keep the doors shut when the tom-foolery is going on. Don't let me hear any of it. Rot!" He shook his morning-paper with an angry rustle, and there was a brief interval of peace as he hurriedly scanned the first page.

Presently he addressed the imperturbable Delia

as a "bedizened female," when she brought in his poached egg. His loud voice made the glass prisms on the chandelier over the table shake like the frightened chattering of a hundred teeth. When he asked Toni to pass the butter, the request sounded like a melodramatic villain saying to a vanquished foe, "Base cur, die a thousand deaths!"

When he saw the amount of butter on the dish he became thoroughly infuriated and hurled invectives of rage and abuse at Delia.

"Delia!" His fist came down on the table with the force of a sledge-hammer. The spoons in the jar uttered a feeble shriek; the prisms shivered; the cups and saucers shook; but Delia stood as expressionless as a huge rag-doll. Not an eyelash flickered.

"Delia, half that quantity of butter is sufficient for a meal!" he roared. "I will not countenance such wasteful extravagance. Take half of that butter away!"

Delia stared blankly at him.

"Is the creature deaf, dumb, or stupid? Speak, woman!" Down crashed the fist again.

Delia folded her arms, drew in a tremendous breath, and stood like a battleship with decks cleared for action.

She spoke. "*Man shall not live by bread alone,*"

by which the Lord meant that man has to have butter on his bread. And if the cows ain't mean with the milk, and the Lord ain't mean with the cream when I'm churnin', I ain't goin' to be mean with the butter!"

Her words were like the explosion of a bomb. Mr. Hastings glared in speechless amazement; the children were aghast at Delia's temerity; and Aunt Olivia bowed behind the refuge of the coffee-urn, as if dodging stray missiles. Delia, with an immobile face, continued her rapid fire of words.

"The Lord made food, and the Lord gave folks appetites, so that food shouldn't go to waste; it being the Lord's intention that folks with appetites should eat food. And I ain't goin' to be the one to upset the Lord's plans while I'm settin' of your table. So long as I churn your butter, it's goin' into stomachs as is ready for it; just as the Lord intended it to do. And if you want to skimp your table with butter, you'll have to get some one else to do your churning."

Delia the Defiant marched out of the room.

There was a faint, nervous giggle from Cecily, and then silence fell like a pall. Mr. Hastings barricaded himself with his newspaper, and Aunt Olivia gazed with dreamy sadness into her coffee, sipping it absent-mindedly. The three children

were filled with an unholy desire to laugh, which they valiantly suppressed by an elaborate system of Fletcherizing each mouthful. They munched slowly and firmly, looking at their plates with fixed intentness.

A faint "mew" roused the attention of all. Delia, in her quick exit, had neglected to close the door, and there stood Mrs. Omar Khayyam, glossy and fluffy, a dream of feline beauty.

Mr. Hastings had a rooted aversion to cats, and the sight of Mrs. Omar was the last straw which brought about a complete collapse of his self-control. Since her arrival, Mrs. Omar had been carefully kept out of his way. Why, oh, why, did she choose this unlucky moment for making her first appearance?

Mr. Hastings crushed his newspaper and threw it at Mrs. Omar, who, when she emerged from its crackling folds, elevated her back and fluffed out her tail and voiced her indignation in a way which was equal, if not superior, to that of her opponent.

"Siss-siss-siss—pstsh-sh-sisstststst!" said Mrs. Omar.

"Whose cat is that? Where did it come from? Who dared to bring it here? It shall be shot at once!" Grandfather rang the bell furiously.

Delia appeared, stolid and immovable,

“Delia, call your father! Take that cat out and have it shot at once! Do you hear? And let me see it afterwards, to assure myself that my orders have—been obeyed. Shot at once, do you hear?” stormed the old man.

He turned to Toni. “I suppose this animal belongs to you, Toni. It looks like you, all legs and fluffy hair; and a spitfire as well. And you, Olivia!” The table trembled under a blow from his hand. “*You* have connived at this, and allowed a chit of a girl to bring this cat into the house! Delia, take it out and tell your father to shoot it immediately.”

Delia stooped and picked up Mrs. Omar.

“Shot at once!” repeated Mr. Hastings.

“No, Basil!” an unexpected voice came from the door. They all turned and beheld Aunt Priscilla, who had not walked from her room for over thirty years, clinging to the door-jamb. Two angry spots flamed in her cheeks, and her gray eyes flashed with scorn.

“That cat shall not be shot! She belongs to me. Do you hear, Basil? She is not to be shot!”

Aunt Priscilla tottered. Toni and Aunt Olivia sprang to her assistance and led her to a chair.

Mr. Hastings nodded his head several times. Priscilla’s appearance had startled him; and his

wrath evaporated with a magical swiftness, like air from a pricked balloon.

“For an invalid of over thirty years’ standing, Priscilla, your exhibition of strength and temper is truly remarkable. It almost tempts me to believe in miracles.”

“Humph! Stop chafing my hands, Olivia! I’m not going to faint. Stay here with that cat, Delia! Humph! Basil, my walking in here may be a miracle; and perhaps my temper was a crutch that helped me along. Or perhaps your temper drew me here like a magnet. All your life your will has seldom been thwarted. You have been obeyed and feared by every one. A command from your lips has usually met with implicit obedience. Olivia’s meekness has encouraged you in your domineering ways. You were spoiled as a child. In the nursery you were allowed to be an autocrat, a little czar. It is not to be wondered at that you have developed into a tyrant. Here’s a miracle for you to believe in! That cat shall not be shot. She is mine, and she stays here with me—in this house. Humph!”

“Bah! Invalids and babies must be humored. Keep your cat if it pleases you, but never let it come in my sight again. Delia, take the cat to Miss Priscilla’s room. Toni, call on Dr. Winthrop and



"FOR AN INVALID OF OVER THIRTY YEARS' STANDING, PRISCILLA, YOUR EXHIBITION OF STRENGTH AND TEMPER IS TRULY REMARKABLE."

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ask him to come and see your aunt. Olivia, see that my things are packed at once. I shall go to Portland to-day instead of to-morrow. Tell the boy to be ready to drive me to the ten-thirty train. You will now have the house to yourselves, with women, cats, and pianos. Bah!" He left the room.

Delia, with Mrs. Omar perched on her shoulder, gazed after him with her wooden expression, which did not change when she turned towards Toni and gave a slow, deliberate wink with her right eye. Aunt Priscilla began to get hysterical, and Cecily and Toni raced off to school, calling at Dr. Winthrop's on their way.

"I hope the walk and the excitement haven't hurt Aunt Priscilla," panted Cecily.

Dr. Winthrop found the patient in a state of hysterical excitement. He gave her a soothing draught, and when she had drifted into a reposeful slumber, he followed Aunt Olivia into the living-room.

"This affair has done Priscilla good," he said. "All these years nature has been effecting a healing process. In fact, I believe Priscilla might have walked long ago if she had roused herself. The cat deserves a medal. I'll come to-morrow, and if she's all right, we'll let her do another little two-step by herself."

“What a wonderful thing for—her!” Aunt Olivia clasped her hands, and a feeble smile shone over her face, like a watery sun in a gray sky.

“And it will be a wonderful thing for you, too, Olivia. You’ve been a good, faithful sister. I’m afraid Priscilla’s invalidism was largely due to lack of will-power. Take a little freedom, my girl! Go out with those jolly little nieces of yours. You’ve allowed yourself to grow old, Olivia. Let those girls restore your youth. Cheer up! But don’t let Priscilla try a cake-walk before I get here to-morrow!”

After the good doctor had gone, Aunt Olivia mused by the fire for a short time. Yes, she had allowed herself to grow old. She had been so young, so bright, when she returned from Germany and found that poor Priscilla had slipped on the stairway and injured her back. ‘Toinette had gone back to France a short time before, and there was the little Annette, who needed a mother’s care. Basil had become silent and morbid, spending all his time, as he did now, in his study with his books and papers. She had expected to go back to Germany, but she remained at home. She was so sorely needed. And now she was old—almost fifty years old!

Delia entered. “If you’re ready, Miss Has-

tings, I can go up with you to see about that room in the south wing."

Aunt Olivia started. "Oh, yes, Delia. I will go with you—now."

"Miss Hastings, I didn't mean no disrespect to you when I spoke up to the old gentleman. I just had to get them words out. I've lived here all my life, and the only way I can hold my job and keep from being a worm, is to sass back now and then when there's need for it; which there always is when one has dealings with a man. For men are thorns in the flesh and an everlasting trial to them that has to do with them. A man is but a man, whichever way you take him. You know that I ain't no talker, but when I *do* talk, I have to say something that's strong and firm. And this morning the old gentleman got my dander up when he called me a female. That's no name to give a woman!"

The Hastings house was well cared for; even the closed rooms, which had not been used for years, were aired regularly and never allowed to become damp or stuffy. The covered furniture, the veiled mirrors, and the swathed chandeliers were frequently given baths of fresh air and sunlight. Daring moths who attempted to invade these domains were routed by the able generalship of

Delia, who was assisted twice a week by her cousin, Amazon Hupper.

Mr. Hastings had expended money liberally for the house, in the way of modern plumbing and heating arrangements. His retrenchments usually took the form of some miserly economy in the matter of food; and his skirmish with Delia over the butter was simply the expression of that petty meanness which selfishness had added to his nature. He was in reality a broken-hearted, dyspeptic old man, whose unsatisfied craving for love drove him to acts of tyranny and displays of childish temper. Having failed in winning love, he took a fiendish delight in inspiring fear.

CHAPTER X

FUGUES, FUDGE, AND LULLABIES

AUNT OLIVIA and Delia entered 'Toinette's boudoir, where the piano had been voiceless for many years. Delia at once lighted a fire in the grate and the shutters were thrown wide-open. It was still a dainty room. The ceiling had been fancifully decorated with a blue sky; and several pretty pink cupids, peek-a-booing behind fleecy white clouds, tossed pink roses to one another.

Now the sky was dim, the cupids looked pale, though still plump, and the roses were faded. The walls were hung with blue silk brocaded with pink roses, as if the cupids had thrown many of their blossoms from the sky. Long, slender mirrors with enameled frames like wreaths of roses paneled the walls. The spindly, gilt furniture was tarnished and dim. The fireplace was of white marble, with fluted columns supporting the shelf.

They carefully removed the thick coverings from the piano and pushed it over towards a window. It was a small, old-fashioned instrument, and the

case had been enameled in white, with dainty rose-designs traced in gilt. Above the keyboard were panels of blue silk whose folds radiated from a pink rose in the center.

Aunt Olivia raised the lid and removed the strip of felt which had covered the keys. How yellow they were! And what tinkling sounds they gave out when she played a few soft, trembling chords!

Basil, who was in his bedroom, heard the sounds, and came along the hall as fast as his crutch would carry him. He burst into the room with shining eyes and flushed cheeks.

"Oh, Aunt Olivia!" he cried; and at once seated himself before the piano.

He ran his fingers over the keys, and his thin face paled with disappointment when he heard the queer, twanging discords produced by the broken strings.

"It's horribly out of tune, and many of the wires are broken; so it's really no use after all!" The poor boy leaned over and hid his face on the music-ledge.

Aunt Olivia laid her hand gently on his shoulder. "Perhaps—your grandfather—will have it put in order."

Basil looked up with a sad smile and shook his head. "I'm afraid to hope for that, Aunt Olivia.

It would just mean another crusher. I'll work at scales and technical exercises on this as long as Grandfather will allow it. I'll try to imagine that it is a practice-clavier. It will be torture, but I think it will be a little better than playing finger-exercises on a table, as I have been doing since I came here."

The next morning a thin, spectacled man with a bristly mustache, and carrying a long black bag, arrived from Portland. Delia answered his knock and left him seated in the large hall while she announced his coming to Aunt Olivia.

"Miss Hastings, there's a man in the hall who says he's come from Portland to look at the piano. I guess he's crazy, for there must be plenty of pianos in Portland for him to look at, without him coming all this way to look at ours."

Aunt Olivia rose. "It must be a man to tune the piano, Delia. I will take him up-stairs."

In the kitchen Delia confided to the stove she was polishing her opinion that it was mighty queer for a man to say he wanted to *look* at the piano if he came to *chune* it; and he must be a *bugglar*, and no mistake! She immediately went to her bedroom and donned all her choice treasures, comprising two rings set with glassy rubies and emeralds, a brooch which shone like a small searchlight, a string of

yellow beads, an Ingersoll watch, and a silver chain-bracelet, dangling with hearts and perforated dimes.

"I guess I look like I was Queen o' Spain, polishin' the stove," she muttered, as she brushed with much elbow-energy. "Chune the piano, indeed! He's a bugclar, that's what; but he don't buggle my things! He won't get so much as a bead off of me."

When she served dinner she regarded the little piano-tuner, whose work would keep him there all day, with a wary eye, though her face was as wooden as ever. Her hearts and dimes rattled, her beads clicked, and her brooch and rings glittered, as if brazenly daring the "chuner" to attempt to "buggle" them.

The stranger seemed to be quite oblivious of the magnificence displayed before him, as he talked of musical affairs in Portland, including the last Festival and a recent organ-recital. These events led up to his announcement that he had written some music; a waltz, several two-steps, and a march, which the theatre orchestra at Peaks' Island had played last summer at the end of each performance.

"To chase the audience out of the house," he ended, giving his joke the support of a feeble laugh.

That evening Basil played for over two hours.

After the girls had studied their lessons and paid their usual good-night visit to Aunt Priscilla and Mrs. Omar Khayyam, they joined him in 'Toi-nette's boudoir.

"I hope Grandfather won't come back until Saturday," said Toni, as she and Cecily went up-stairs. "Lex is coming to supper to-morrow night, and I almost wish I hadn't asked him. If Grandfather *is* home, and should happen to be in one of his nasty moods,—well, it will be awful!"

"Perhaps he'll be pleasant," answered Cecily in consoling tones. "And, you know, he can be perfectly darling when he *is* pleasant."

Toni had alternate intervals of trembling fear and wavering hope up to the last moment. On Friday afternoon, just as she was strapping her books together, and preparing to leave the Academy with Cecily and Lex, she glanced out the window and beheld Cæsar Silas driving Mr. Hastings from the station.

"Grandfather's come back!" she whispered in dismay to the waiting Cecily.

"Oh, Toni! he'll be awful, I'm sure! We haven't seen him since that dreadful row about Mrs. Omar on Wednesday. He'll be sure to insult all of us and make Lex feel uncomfortable. Oh, suppose we tell Lex that his visit has to be post-

poned until next week; that we aren't well, getting smallpox or diphtheria or lumbago or something; and he'd better not come. I simply couldn't stand a scene before Lex. I'll pretend to have lumbago now! What are the symptoms, and where does one *have* lumbago?"

Toni gritted her teeth. "No, I'm going to face it out. In spite of all his queersome cranks, Grandfather is a gentleman; and I feel that he will be decent when there is a guest in the house."

Nevertheless Toni quaked when she and Cecily entered the house with Lex. The boy's shyness was not apparent when he met the two aunts. Under the influence of Cecily and Toni, Lex was rapidly learning to drop his awkward ways. When supper was ready, Toni went with a shivering dread to Mr. Hastings's study.

"Supper is ready, Grandfather," she announced. "And Lex is here. You remember you said I might invite him."

"Lex? H'm! The boy from Barber's farm, isn't he? What are you going to give him for supper? Have you killed the fatted calf for him, and for me—the returned prodigal?"

"We have a tempting supper, but there's no veal." She gave him a mischievous glance. "I believe I'm glad to see you, Grandfather! Make

me very glad," she rubbed her cheek against his sleeve, "by being very nice."

He smiled at the whimsical entreaty of her face. "Being very nice, eh? Well, here's a beginning."

He gave her a neatly wrapped parcel, tied with tinsel cord. There was no mistaking the contents.

"Candies!" she exclaimed. "Grandfather, you're a duck!"

She linked her arm in his and led him to the living-room.

"Here's Grandfather!" she called in merry tones as they entered, as if his coming were the very jolliest thing that could have happened.

Lex was introduced and met with a friendly welcome from the old man. During the meal Grandfather talked entertainingly, and adroitly led their guest into the conversation, nodding approvingly when Lex became enthusiastic and talked brilliantly for a boy of his years.

"There's something in that lad," thought Grandfather. And, as he noticed the roughened hands and broken finger-nails, he added, "Pity he has to work on a farm—too good for it."

When they rose from the table, Basil turned to his grandfather. "If it won't disturb you, sir, we are going to have some music up-stairs," he began diffidently.

"Music? Bah! Keep the doors shut." Grandfather turned to Lex. "Come again, my boy! Let me see, suppose we say next Friday? That is the only evening you young people are free from studies, isn't it?"

"I—I should like to come," responded Lex. "But I don't think I can get another holiday so soon. To-night I arranged with one of the men to do my work, but I'm afraid I shall not be able to do so again. It's very good of you to invite me, sir."

"Not at all, not at all! Come if you can—my guest next time, not Toni's."

They went up-stairs and carefully closed the door of 'Toinette's room.

"I won't play anything more lively than lullabies and nocturnes," observed Basil, as he gave a preliminary ripple of pianissimo scales and arpeggios. "I don't want to disturb Grandfather; he's been so decent to-night."

Although the register of the furnace was pouring warm breaths into the dainty room, they made a small fire in the grate.

"I think I must be related to Mrs. Omar," laughed Toni, as she drew a slender stool towards the fire. "I love to bask like a cat in the glow of a fire. Draw your chair up, Lex. You have the

candies, Cecily, haven't you? Nibble away! Look at those dear little, anæmic cupids! The firelight has given them such a healthy color that they look as if they had been taking iron pills."

"Shall I light the lamp?" asked Lex.

"No, thanks," was Basil's reply. "I like to play by firelight. It's more romantic."

He played a couple of Field's Nocturnes, and then drifted into the more elaborate ones of Chopin. Presently he paused.

"I wonder if this is disturbing Grandfather."

"I'll run down and see if you can be heard in the hall," cried Toni, jumping up.

She closed the door after her and crept carefully down the front stairway. The plaintive melody of the "G-major Nocturne" could be faintly heard, and came to her ears like a little lost dream. As she drew near to Mr. Hastings's study, she noticed that the door had been propped wide-open. Peering into the room, she saw her grandfather sitting in his usual place before the fire, an open book lying unheeded on his knee. He was listening!

She hurriedly returned to the others. "It's all right, Basil! Play away, and don't worry. It isn't disturbing Grandfather!"

"Hurray! Chuck me a chocolate, Cecily."

With a chocolate caramel dissolving in his mouth, Basil played a fugue of Bach's.

"Ooh!" groaned Toni when he had finished. "Don't give us another fugue! *Fudge*, I call it. Fugues are the most tantalizing things I have ever heard. They are musical puzzles, and would sound just as well if they were played upside-down. A fugue starts off with a simple little statement of a few notes; a thread of a tune played by one hand. The other hand answers it, and the first hand doesn't like it. Then there is a tangle of tunes, each hand talking back at the other in an idiotic way, so that the brain of the listener is caught in a snarl of sounds. For a few moments there's an awful mix-up, and then the whole thing ends in nothing. *Fudge*, say I to fugues! And here I swallow a piece of fudge."

"Play Chopin's 'Berceuse,'" suggested Cecily, selecting another bit of nougat.

The beautiful slumber-melody floated from the piano. Basil played the unvarying accompaniment with a soft, delicate precision, the swaying, monotonous rhythm suggesting the rocking movement of a cradle. His caressing touch made the melody sing with silvery sweetness through the lacy variations, which were like a gauzy dream deftly woven with dainty runs and trills, fairy filaments of sound.

When he had finished, he turned to Toni. "Come, Toni, spout us a poem."

Toni hastily swallowed the remains of a dissolving chocolate. She gazed dreamily into the fire and recited "The Lady of Shalott," while Basil improvised an accompaniment. This was a favorite diversion of theirs. Toni, with her musical, low-toned voice, recited beautifully; and Basil had the wonderful gift of being able to express in tones the soul of harmony hidden in the poet's words.

"What a wonderful effect you two get in that way!" exclaimed Lex at the end.

"I think that is so sad;" and the sentimental Cecily dabbed a tear off her nose. "So pathetic! the poor thing!"

Toni reached over to the box and tossed another chocolate to Basil. With a Jordan almond tucked in her left cheek, she began: "To my mind, the Lady of Shalott was an awful chump. After the curse came upon her she needn't have moped and mooned in her castle until the dreary autumn and it was time for her to die. She might have put on her best gown and sailed down to Camelot in 'the blue, unclouded weather.' There she would have had a good time flirting with all the knights, and going to banquets and tournaments. Then, perhaps, she wouldn't have died after all. If a curse

descended upon me, no one would hear me singing a swan-song about it while I sank beneath its weight. I'd kick up my heels so that no curse should have a chance to roost on me!" She crunched the almond between her teeth.

"Good!" cried Lex. "I agree with you, Toni. Miss Shalott *was* a chump. Take Lady Clare, now! She was a wise damsel. When she went to tell Lord Ronald about Nurse Alice's perfidy, note that she had a sense of dramatic values. She dressed for the part. 'She clad herself in a russet gown,' says Tennyson. It was most becoming to her complexion, I am sure! And then she had the forethought to place 'a single rose in her hair.' Naturally Lord Ronald fell for it. No man could withstand such wiles."

"Then there's the Beggar Maid," went on Basil with a laugh. "She was another sly minx, I know! Pleading eyes, downcast looks, long curling lashes formed the 'lovesome mien' that won King Cophetua. Those poetry ladies were 'sly, devilish sly,' as our old friend, Joey B., would say."

They all laughed merrily. Lex glanced at Basil's clock which stood on the mantel.

"Forget the time, Lex," said Basil. "Wait a few moments and we'll give you something to think about when you are walking along that dreary road

to-night; something to shine 'on icy fallow and faded forest.' Tune up for the 'Gleam,' Toni! Now, everybody get ready and—'follow the gleam.' ”

He began a simple theme of wondrous beauty, and wove it like a golden thread through harmonies of various colors. Toni recited “Merlin and the Gleam ”; and the music caught the gleam like an inspiration. It was a song of enchantment, and listeners and performers fell under its spell as the triumphant chords swept on to the end and Toni's ringing voice cried out, “After it, follow it, follow the gleam!”

CHAPTER XI

A LETTER, A WEDDING, AND A SNEEZE

"TONI, how do you spell 'assassination'?" asked Cecily, looking up from a letter she was writing.

Toni was seated at the other end of the table, similarly employed. Her pen was careering madly across the page, leaving an irregular trail of writing behind it.

"Assassination?" repeated Toni.

"Yes. How is it spelled?" a little frown of perplexity furrowed Cecily's placid brow.

"Double ass-i-n-a-t-i-o-n." Toni's pen tripped and caused a splash of tiny blots.

"Wh-what?"

"Write 'ass' twice, which is equal to double-ass; and join them to i-n-a-t-i-o-n. There you have 'assassination.'"

"I'm such a dreadful speller," sighed Cecily. "When I try to spell words like 'believe' and 'receive,' I never can remember whether the *i* precedes the *e*, or the *e* precedes the *i*."

"That's easy," rejoined Toni. "Make them

both alike; either two *e*'s or two *i*'s. Many people make their *i*'s loopy, like *e*'s. There's an advantage in that careless method, because people can't decide whether you have misspelled the word or whether your penmanship is so characteristic that it is illegible."

"But I want to write distinctly," objected Cecily; and she looked down at the dainty calligraphy of her half-written page.

"And you do," added Toni. "Your writing is so pretty and clear that you can't possibly disguise bad spelling. When you aren't sure about a word, just drop a blot on it. That will cover up the crime."

"Oh, I shouldn't like to do that!" cried Cecily. "I think it is dreadful to send people smudgy letters. Anyway, you have no excuse for your untidy letters. You *can* spell, and yet you have blots on every page."

"I know, but I can't help it, for my fingers always go into mourning when I write. Just look!" Toni held out her right hand and showed three blackened fingers.

It was Saturday afternoon, and the two girls were seated at the table near their bedroom window. A fire burned steadily in the grate. Outside the sky was low and menacing, and the ocean boomed

incessantly. The green of the distant islands seemed almost black.

"It makes me feel cold just to look outside," murmured Cecily.

Faint sounds of Basil's practising came from the south wing. Toni rose and opened the door.

"With winter staring me in the face outside, it's comforting to hear Basil playing spring-songs and bird-music," she remarked; and she picked up a partly eaten apple from the table and proceeded to munch.

"Will you put my letter to Dad in the envelope with yours?" asked Cecily, as she pushed a folded letter towards Toni. "And now for an apple and 'David Copperfield,'" she added.

She was soon curled up in the big rocking-chair, eating an apple and sniffing audibly over the death of little Dora.

Toni drew a fresh sheet of paper towards her and began to write.

Ultima Thule.

DEAR OLD DADDUMS:

This is the coldest November in Maine in twenty years. Thus saith Cæsar Silas.

The ground is like iron; the air is invisible ice; and it is so cold that even the wind has been frightened away. Everything is still. The roar of the ocean is subdued and queer. The great pines stand

motionless, as if they felt the awful weight of the sky pressing upon them. So much for the bleakness outside.

Within, it is warm and cheerful. Down in the cellar the furnace is doing its duty, and is like a fabulous dragon in a dark cave, belching forth fiery breaths of hot air. Then there is a gay little fire in the grate, blossoming like a rose, with flame-petals curling and uncurling.

Cecily and I are getting along well at school, and we are now acquainted with most of the Peacedale people, who no longer stare at us as if we were wild animals escaped from the winter quarters of a circus.

I wish you could see some of the people! Mr. and Mrs. Fly, for instance. He is a huge giant of a man, with a frightened expression and a long beard. He always seems to be hiding behind his beard. And no wonder! His wife, Mandy, is small, wiry, and loquacious. A look from her eye is like the sting of a bee. She has a quick, sibilant way of speaking, so that her conversation fairly *hisses* in one's ear. She sees everything, hears everything, and tells everything—evil, of course; so she does not in any way resemble that famous trio of Nikko monkeys. She looks like a witch, and I am sure she rides about on a broomstick at night.

Another personage worth seeing is Ezekiel Martin, constable of Peacedale. Every day at noon he parades the main street, swinging his stick in his hand, just to show that he is keeper of law and order in Peacedale. His position is a sinecure; for Peacedale, as its name implies, is an abode

of the just and meek. If Ezekiel ever had to arrest any one, I believe he would drop dead with apoplexy. He is short and very, very fat; and he struts along with the gait of a plump, overfed pigeon. Indeed, he is like an Atlas who is carrying the world in his waistcoat instead of on his shoulders. His nose is a dream—a rosy dream; for it is ruddier than the cherry. It looks as if an army of blushes had gathered all their forces and pitched their camp behind the ramparts of his bristling mustache. His voice is a combination of squeaks and grunts and panting breaths, so that when he speaks he resembles a broken-winded harmonium.

Mrs. Sawyer, the wife of the general storekeeper, is another Peacedale celebrity, famed chiefly for her sneeze. Foundations shake, walls tremble, and roofs are carried bodily away when Mrs. Sawyer sneezes. A stranger visiting Peacedale and seeing ruin and devastation everywhere might ask in awed tones, "Has there been an earthquake?" But a Peacedale native would nonchalantly reply, "Oh, no; Mrs. Sawyer sneezed last night."

Aunt Priscilla and Basil are very chummy. She is able to walk a little now, and usually has her meals with the family. How I long for our jolly, chatty meal-times! Here I always feel that Banquo is sitting beside me—a gory ghost. Every one is grim and silent, and it seems almost a crime to swallow. Aunt Olivia is kind and sweet, but she is so vague that she seems but a mere shadow of a personality. I always feel shy when I talk to her; and, you know, shyness with me is not constitutional! But I simply cannot get near to Aunt

Olivia. She makes me feel as if I were talking over the long-distance telephone with some one I had never seen. And I never can tell the truth when I talk through a telephone.

Grandfather is a puzzle. Sometimes he is a darling and does the *dearest* things. Then he veers in the opposite direction and he is the most hateful person in the world. No ogre in a fairy-tale can equal him. I can't account for his queer nature. In attempting to diagnose his character I halt between two opinions—sheer cussedness or biliousness. Perhaps it is both. His fits of good humor are “like angels’ visits, few and far between.” At those times he is really a lovable old man; but he usually manifests an inexplicable aversion to the sight of us, and his unfriendly attitude freezes any affection we may feel like showing him. His temper is like an old, worn-out bridge, and ought to be labeled: “Dangerous—Drive Slow!”

I didn't tell you about the Harvest Festival, did I? The dear little church looked so pretty! It was decorated with autumn leaves, sheaves of grain, shocks of corn, potted flowers from various homes, and pumpkins. Yes, pumpkins! And they were great golden orbs, positively poetic. I couldn't help thinking of how they would look hollowed out and slit with eyes, nose, and mouth, according to Hallowe'en custom, with lighted candles inside. And it seemed that every pumpkin was grinning at me in the most diabolical way during prayers, which, of course, filled me with an intense longing to giggle. I was glad when the congregation stood up to sing; and I joined them lustily in declaring

how we had ploughed the fields and scattered the good seed on the land.

I wish you knew Lex. He is so brave and cheerful in spite of all his difficulties. He is a sermon to me. When I get grouchy and dissatisfied, I think of the wonderful courage he shows in his battle with destiny; and I pull myself out of the slough of despond and begin to climb the heights and reach out towards the stars.

Among other things, Lex is an excellent French scholar, solely through his own efforts. Unaided, he has studied for four years; but his pronunciation is terrible. That is where little Toni comes in. I didn't have a French grandmother for nothing. So when we walk to school together we speak French, and I am polishing his accent for him.

A dear letter came from Jean yesterday. It is so good to hear from some one who sees you occasionally. And wasn't I glad to hear that you weren't picking oakum or jute or anything of that sort! I thought all prisoners picked oakum; and I feel sure it must be horrible, though I don't exactly know what it is like. Jean tells me that you are doing clerical work and have charge of the prison library.

Mrs. Omar is sleek and well. She sends you a purr and a pat of her paw.

Just at this moment Basil is playing Grieg's "I Love Thee," one of your favorites. I wish you could hear it, so that it might tell you that: "I love thee better than all else on earth. I love thee for Time and Eternity!"

TONI LONG-LEGS.

"Dear old Dad!" murmured Toni as she sealed the letter.

She glanced out the window. "Oh, you great, restless old ocean! What are you striving for? Is there some unsatisfied longing hidden in your heart that makes you murmur and moan so ceaselessly? Oh, you big world, so full of hope, joy, sorrow, and love! Surely somewhere there is some force of justice that can be set in motion to right all wrongs and give me back my father!"

A wind began to shriek around the corner of the house and whirled through the pines, waving their plumes in its mad grasp, so that the trees seemed to move like Birnam Wood marching on to Dunsinane.

"Snow!" cried Toni.

Cecily dropped her book and rushed to the window. Huge flakes were being sifted from the sky. The wind tossed them wildly about.

"Those flakes are like a swarm of white bees," mused Cecily.

"Or flower-ghosts," added Toni. "And see how those red berries gleam! The shrubs look as if they were strung with coral beads."

Soon the whirling mass of white grew thicker and hid the sea from view. A little drift piled up on the window-sill outside, and the pines began to sheet

themselves like ghosts. The hard, frozen ground was quickly covered with snow. The roaring of the ocean was muffled and mysterious, its regular pulse sounding like the tread of winter's unseen army, marching to the music of the wild north-east wind. The iron conqueror, Winter, had arrived!

On the last Wednesday in November, Peacedale was roused temporarily from its winter sleep by the wedding of Lucy Cutter, daughter of Micah Cutter, who was proprietor of the Peacedale Inn, and Lorenzo Twichell, owner of a small lumber-mill up the river.

Lucy was a dashing coquette, and had kept several beaux dangling to her string; so that when she finally decided in favor of Lorenzo every one was interested in the affair, and every one planned to be present at the wedding.

Lucy had insisted on a church wedding, much against the wishes of the bashful groom, who would rather have slunk off with his bride, to be married in the next village. The pretty Lucy, however, was determined to be seen in the glory of her wedding-gown, made by a Portland dress-maker.

People began to gather at the church long before the time fixed for the ceremony. Even several of

the men of Peacedale were there, but their presence was the result of a practical joke. Tommy Watkins and Otis Brackett, who were convalescing from whooping-cough, and were in a state of partial quarantine which enforced their absence from school, rang the church-bell with the quick, sharp strokes that signified a fire-alarm. All the members of the volunteer fire department responded, and quickly appeared at the church, pulling the hose-reel. Finding no one there to direct them to the scene of conflagration, they realized that they had been hoaxed.

“Stung!” ejaculated Jim Trefethen. “Well, boys, let’s go inside and lend a little rank and tone to the wedding.”

The pupils at the Academy were restless throughout the morning; and every time a sleigh jingling with bells dashed by, a quiver of anxious excitement disturbed the classes. The mind of every boy and girl was asking and trying to answer the question, “Shall we get to church in time to see the wedding?”

Mr. Gifford, with a good-natured smile, dismissed the classes half an hour earlier than usual, on condition that the pupils agreed to remain later in the afternoon. This motion was carried unanimously. There was a pell-mell rush to St.

Stephen's Church, and they arrived just in time to see the bride enter the quaint little Gothic door with her father. Breathless and eager, the girls and boys crept in and seated themselves in the rear of the church, while Lucy waited in the porch, in order to have her train and veil adjusted.

The buxom and blushing bride walked slowly up the aisle towards the altar, where Lorenzo stood, flushed and choking in a high collar and a tight black suit. Even then he seemed to fear that the flirtatious Lucy, won after a siege of ardent wooing, might elude him and pick up some other admirer in preference to him before she reached the altar. Bracing his shoulders, swallowing hard, and almost splitting his coat, he rushed down the aisle to meet her.

Opinions varied afterwards as to how he greeted Lucy. Kathryn Lindsay reported that she distinctly heard him say in quivering accents, "I've come to meet my bride!" Jim Trefethen, however, averred most solemnly that Lorenzo's words were, "Behold the bridegroom cometh!"

The nervous Lorenzo seized Lucy's plump hand like a drowning man grasping a plank, and when they reached the altar, he gave an audible sigh of relief, which provoked a repressed titter from the congregation.

Mr. Lindsay, in snowy surplice, read the lines of the service with a rich, melodious voice. The words of the admonition were uttered with a solemnity which created a thrill of awed expectancy among the auditors:

"Therefore if any man can shew any just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak or else hereafter forever hold his peace."

There was a silence so tense that breaths were suspended and hearts almost ceased beating. For a few seconds it was oppressive. Then Mrs. Sawyer fired the shot heard round the world! She *sneezed!* The awful silence was rent with a prolonged "A-a-a-achee-hooooo!" which made the very rafters ring.

Every one gasped, and several hysterical laughs were heard. Mr. Lindsay saved the situation by promptly going on with the service, whose impressiveness was somewhat marred by the bride's unsuccessful efforts to suppress her giggles. Instead of making the customary response of "I will," she pertly said, "I guess so."

Mrs. Sawyer was the heroine of the hour, and afterwards she received more laughing congratulations than the bride.

The next day brought skating, for the ice on

Chandler's Pond was declared safe. Cecily and Toni depleted their pocketbooks that afternoon in buying skates at Ben Sawyer's store.

"What *are* we going to do about buying Christmas presents?" asked Cecily anxiously, as they walked along with clinking skates.

"Jumping Jupiter!" exclaimed Toni aghast. "I forgot all about Christmas being so near, and it is only four weeks away. I have just three pennies left, and that isn't enough to buy chewing-gum for Delia."

"O dear! it's awful to be poor and have no nunny,—I mean no money," said Cecily in aggrieved tones. "I almost wish we hadn't bought these skates."

"We must have money for Christmas," declared Toni. "We simply *must*! I'm going to think out some way of getting money. You know, if you think hard enough about things you want, some sort of inspiration comes and shows you how to get them. You know the idea—moving mountains with mustard-seeds."

They had an early supper with Jim Trefethen and Ma, and afterwards they all drove to Chandler's Pond in the old pung.

It was a wonderful night—clear, sparkling, and cold. The moon silvered the sky and gave the snow

a dazzling radiance. The frosty air above seemed to be glittering with stars strung on moonbeams. The boys of Peacedale had swept the pond clean of snow; and from the high white banks piled around the edge, immense willows and poplars lifted their leafless branches towards the sky. A large bonfire was built near one end of the pond, where several benches were placed for the onlookers and those who wished to rest. Forms skimmed along the ice into the rosy glow which the fire threw out and then disappeared into the silvery gloom beyond.

The air was filled with shouts and laughter and the scrunching, scratching sounds of the skates cutting through the ice. They played tag and crack-the-whip, and sang songs, the fresh young voices ringing out on the air with the sweetness of silver bells. Teddy Hale and Bobby Sterling played their mouth-organs as they skated, until their lips were almost paralyzed.

"How I wish Lex could have been with us!" said Toni regretfully, as Jim drove them home after leaving Ma at the cottage.

"There's not much pleasure comes to Alexander," was Jim's reply. "When he isn't working for the Barbers, he's filling his head with knowledge, so he doesn't get much time for fun. It's a

weary road he has to travel,—dusty, windy, and full of rough stones. I often think that life is like a road stretching out ahead of us. We're all striving to reach some goal, and a great deal depends upon how we look at the road. Some folks get discouraged and say, 'Oh, all this long way to go before we get to where we are going!' And every step is a burden to them. Others, like Alexander, think, 'This road leads to where we are going; therefore it is part of the goal!' And they start out with a courage that can't be downed. With folks like that, just the starting is a glory, an achievement. Alexander'll get his reward some day. This is how I know. Yesterday I read in one of my 'Home University' books some sentences from Emerson. There's a wise man! 'Put God in your debt,' says Emerson. That's what Alexander is doing. 'He's putting God in his debt,' said I to Ma. 'And God'll pay with interest,' said Ma; for she's just about as wise as Emerson.

"So Alexander's laying up a big bank-account in Heaven, with his brave struggles and his uncomplaining patience. I don't suppose a day goes by without the recording angel adding something to Alexander's credit,—some mean duty well done, some disappointment faced with a smile, some

broken hope propped up with courage. That's Alexander! I guess he and Ma are the biggest creditors the Lord has."

"I should say you are a fairly big creditor yourself, Jim," said Toni.

"No; with me it's the other way about. I'm in the Lord's debt; and any good I'm able to do scarcely pays the interest on the loan the Lord advanced me when I got Ma. But I go on doing the best I can; and perhaps when everything is evened up at the end, Ma's account will help to balance mine."

CHAPTER XII

AN ADVENTURE AND ITS HAPPY ENDING

BASIL was industriously practising scales, diatonic and chromatic. His fingers rippled over the keys of the piano in double intervals, with wonderful clearness and velocity. The major and minor thirds and augmented fourths were tossed into the air like a prismatic spray of pearls, light, delicate, and shimmering.

Toni, coated, hatted, and gloved, came into the room and stood quietly beside him. He glanced up and saw an expression of grim determination on her face.

“What’s the matter?” he asked, and his left hand careered up and down with the scale of E-flat major.

“Can and will you lend me a dollar, Basil?”

“A dollar? I think so.”

He emptied the contents of his pocket on the keyboard and counted over the change.

“Fifty—seventy-five—eighty-five—ninety—one dollar! *and* three cents. There! that’s the last of

my resources. I willingly lend you the dollar, and cheerfully *give* you the three cents."

"Thanks ever so much." Toni gathered up the change and placed it carefully in her bag.

"What's in the wind?" inquired Basil.

"I'm going over to Portland. Aunt Olivia gave me permission. I didn't consult Grandfather, for he's so full of bedevilment these days that he would have ordered me to jail for a week, had I so much as spoken to him. Is there anything you want from town?"

He gave her a rueful smile. "Well, yes; but you've cleaned me out. I need some music manuscript-paper and my watch is on the blink—keeps losing time. It needs some attention, but I don't want to entrust it to Henry Cox, our Peacedale jeweler, pump-mender, and dentist. He may be an artist so far as pumps and teeth are concerned, but I'd hate to have him monkey with my watch. But never mind! If you could squeeze out the price of a few sheets of paper from that dollar, I'd be glad. The watch can wait."

Soon after Toni reached the station the train came in. She hurriedly entered the day-coach, seating herself on the side facing the ocean; and she did not notice that another Peacedale passenger drove up and mounted the steps of the Pullman.

When the train arrived at Portland, she descended to the platform with a quaking heart. She wandered about several dingy streets, gazing nervously up at the signs until she found what she was searching for—three golden balls suspended over a door. On the window appeared the name, "Jacob Seiffertitz, Pawnbroker," in white porcelain letters.

She passed and repassed the place, sometimes pausing to look in the window, where a heterogeneous collection of unredeemed articles was displayed. Several times she hesitated before the door, and then, in a panic of fear, turned and fled, as if she feared that Jacob Seiffertitz would come out and hurl the golden balls at her head. Often she would walk on the opposite side of the street, gazing across with a frightened fascination. At last she made a bold, straight dash and entered the shop.

She assumed an offhand manner, as if entering pawnshops were a daily occurrence with her; but her heart was fluttering in her throat like a frightened bird, and her knees felt as if they were made of flimsy muslin, and wobbled like the knees of a rag-doll that had recently suffered a sawdust hemorrhage.

There was no one in sight, and she gazed about the shop apprehensively. It was a curious place. On one side were cupboards with glass doors, pad-

locked. These were filled with wearing apparel. On the other side, behind the counter, were shelves, also protected with glass doors, containing various objects,—old-fashioned silverware, revolvers, a violin with broken strings, two banjos, some quaint china, candlesticks, medals, and some framed prints, faded and yellow-margined.

The counter held a glass case, which was filled with jewelry of all kinds, ticketed with price-labels. The rear of the store was in darkness, but the bulky form of a huge safe loomed through a grating which had been silvered with aluminum paint. There was a close, musty smell combined with the odor of moth-balls.

Presently the door of the grating was pushed back, and a little round-shouldered man appeared, shuffling along in a pair of carpet-slippers. He came behind the counter and looked over the case at Toni with a pair of rheumy eyes. He had a moth-eaten appearance, and smelled as if he had been packed away in moth-balls for years.

“Vell, vat can I do for you dis morning, my young friendt?”

“I—er—I have some things I—er—I wish to pawn.” She drew a small package from her bag.

“Ach so?”

She carefully unfolded the tissue paper and dis-

closed an amber necklace, an opal ring, and a watch.

The man took a pair of spectacles from a shabby case, and put them on with trembling hands. He examined the articles carefully, sighing deeply with asthmatic wheezes. He opened the watch and turned it over several times. Then, laying the things on the tissue paper, he pushed them towards her with a gesture of contempt.

“Tree tollars.”

“Three dollars?” echoed Toni in dismay. “Why, I wanted twenty-five.”

Jacob Seiffertitz raised his hands and eyes heavenward. “*Mein Gott im Himmel!* Vat you tink I am? A Vanderbilt vat gifs his moneys away for nodings?”

“The watch alone is expensive, and worth more than twenty-five dollars,” protested Toni.

He shrugged his shoulders. “Ach! de vatch! It iss oldt-fashionedt! It iss not new. I gif you six tollars.”

Toni shook her head. “No, I must have at least twenty.”

He sighed and choked and then wiped his bleary eyes with a yellow handkerchief. “Vell, ve split de differenz! I vill be generous—I vill gif you eight.” He leered at her with a toothless smile.

"No." Toni was firm.

"Vell, now led me see! I make it ten tollars. Vat you say to dat? Ten tollars! *Mein Gott!*"

Toni hesitated and bit her lip. "Very well; I'll take ten dollars."

He placed the things in a drawer and handed her a filthy ten-dollar bill, which he took from a wallet literally bursting with wealth. He then began to write on a ticket, muttering as he painstakingly formed each letter.

"I know dat I in de poorhouse die! I, Jacob Seiffertitz, de friendt of effery one. My pizness will to de deffle go; and I mit. Vat iss your name und de address?"

Toni gave him the required information, and he continued: "Dere iss no chance for an honest man in dis worldt dat iss so filled mit cheats, deceptions, und duplicities. Dere, my young friendt!" He handed her the ticket. "Dere iss your receipt; und ven you look at it you vill tink mit de tears in your eyes, of how you have made one pig swindle on a poor, honest man vat tries to do pizness mit goot faith und integrities."

She folded the ticket and put it in her bag. With a sense of mingled humiliation and relief, she rushed towards the door. Out she ran and collided violently with a gentleman who was passing. He was

clad in a fur-lined overcoat the collar of which was turned up and almost reached his sealskin cap. He stooped to pick up his cane, which the collision had knocked from his hand.

"I beg your pardon! I'm so sorry!" began Toni as he rose; and she found herself face to face with *Grandfather!*

A malicious smile lighted his face as he saw her speechless chagrin.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," he said, glancing with raised eyebrows at the pawnshop. "Being your guardian, may I assume the right of inquiring what your business is in this questionable locality? And while you tell me, we will walk on."

They turned towards Congress Street. Toni was too mortified to utter a word, and hot, vexatious tears of confusion filled her eyes.

"Well, I am waiting for your explanation." His voice was stern, but there was a queer little light beneath his bushy white brows; a light which might have seemed like an encouraging twinkle of humor to Toni, if she could have seen over the barrier of the high collar.

In sheer desperation she spoke. "I—er—I needed some money, Grandfather; and so I have just pawned some of my trinkets. I didn't like doing it. It was *awful!* But Christmas is on the

way, and I have to have some money to buy presents. As Jo March said, 'Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents.' So I sneaked over here by myself, and hunted about until I found a pawnshop. Of course, Aunt Olivia gave me permission to come to town, but she didn't know what my errand was. No one knew it. It's quite my own idea. I—er—I never dreamed of meeting you! I didn't know you were coming to town. You must have traveled on the same train as I did. It's just my luck to be found out if I attempt to do anything unusual."

"Pawnshops! Bah!" His cane tapped the sidewalk impatiently. "A nice morsel the Peacedale gossips would have had to chew on, if Mandy Fly had happened to pass by as my granddaughter was coming out of a pawnshop. Bah!"

"Oh, Grandfather! that would have been worse than meeting you! I'd much rather get a scolding from you than have Mandy Fly see me! Really, I feel relieved that it *is* you after all! It has been the most funnily awful experience I have ever had. Did you ever try to pawn anything, Grandfather? You ought to see Jacob Seiffertitz, and *hear* him!"

She gave him an amusing description of her interview, and suddenly she realized that they were

laughing together over "cheats, deceptions, and duplicities."

"But, Grandfather," she paused. "Aren't you going to scold me? Aren't you going to be nasty over it? Do scold me quickly, and let us get it over. If there is to be an avalanche, I want it to descend at once."

"You deserve a sound scolding, young lady; but I am not in the mood for it just now, so I'll reserve it for another time."

"Well, then, if I may, I'll go and do some of my Christmas shopping and spend my ill-gotten gains."

"We'll have luncheon together first, and then I'll join you in your shopping. H'm, Christmas shopping! There's a restaurant next door to Longfellow's old home. We'll go there."

Toni gave his arm a little squeeze. "You dear, detestable, delightful old man! I'm glad I met you, after all!"

When they entered the restaurant Toni insisted on having a small table near a window, overlooking the garden next door.

"Oh!" she cried as she pulled off her gloves. "Just think! we are looking into Longfellow's back yard! Perhaps he played marbles under that tree. That shed may be the barn behind which Mr. Finney's celebrated turnip grew. And there's a vine

still clinging to the moldering wall. Ooh! it *is* interesting!"

Grandfather handed her the menu. "Order what you wish."

Toni didn't honor the card with a glance. "Planked steak," she said without hesitation.

"For two," added Grandfather.

When the waitress had gone off with their order, Grandfather looked at Toni's flushed face and sparkling eyes.

"Now, why didn't you come to me for money instead of dickering with a pawnbroker?"

"Come to you?" she exclaimed. "Why, Grandfather, for the last two weeks I have scarcely dared to breathe or think in your presence. You have snubbed us all unmercifully if we ventured to say a word. I don't believe you realize how difficult and disagreeable you are at times. I really couldn't have asked you for the money. It would have taken more courage to do that than it did to face Jacob Seiffertitz. Besides, I wanted the money to buy Christmas presents with, and if I had asked you for it, it would have been like requesting you to buy presents for my friends. Now, this ten-dollar bill is my own. I feel as if I had earned it; though when I first met you, I felt as if I had just stolen it."

“You had better turn your pawn-ticket over to me. I’ll allow you something for it; say fifteen dollars. Then I’ll redeem the jewels and hold them as security. This sort of thing is often done, and I shall be getting the best of the bargain. I presume your treasures are worth more than twenty-five dollars.”

She hesitated. “But, Grandfather ——”

“Come along! Let us get this affair finished before the steak arrives. I don’t want to be worried with business matters then. Here are fifteen dollars;” he passed her three bills. “Now, let me have the ticket in exchange.”

She handed it to him reluctantly.

“Ahem! In future, if you wish to dispose of jewels, let me be your pawnbroker. I feel now that I have qualified myself as a rival of your friend, Jacob.”

The steak was placed on the table, and Toni beamed across it at her grandfather.

“Grandfather, you are perfectly scrumptious! You are adorable!”

Immediately after they had finished their luncheon, they went on their shopping-tour. With twenty-five dollars in her purse, Toni allowed herself to be extravagant; so they were laden with parcels by the time they were ready to go to the station.

Grandfather had suggested having the things sent, but Toni insisted on taking them with her.

“When I buy Christmas presents, I want to hug them, and keep them near me. I want to put love into them as soon as I have bought them,” she explained in excited tones.

So he tucked his cane under his arm, and burdened himself with bundles, as he followed in her wake from store to store, until he looked like a relative of Santa Claus.

Toni would have shopped indefinitely, for it seemed impossible to spend all her money; but at half-past four, Grandfather insisted on calling a cab and driving to the station.

“You can come back another time,” he said, when she protested that she hadn’t bought half the things she wanted.

They returned to Peacedale in the parlor-car, and Toni gazed blissfully at the mountain of packages which rose from the floor beside her chair.

“I feel like the princess in a fairy-tale, and you are a good, fur-coated genie. I have the loveliest Christmassy sort of feeling in my heart,—peace, good-will, and all that sort of thing. Don’t you feel *glowy*, too, Grandfather?”

He smiled at her eager face. A little glow was kindled in his heart among the wreckage of hopes,

lost dreams, and frustrated desires piled there by the wind and storm of many years. 'The little fire of driftwood, lighted by love, burned feebly, but it gave out a ray of cheer over the desolate shore of the old man's life.

CHAPTER XIII

A CHRISTMAS ENTERTAINMENT

WHEN November made way for hoary December, Peacedale began to get ready for the Christmas entertainment which was given annually in the lodge meeting-room over the fire-hall. The days slipped by in busy preparations, and at last the fateful night, the twenty-second, arrived; a night of joy and nervous thrills for fond parents, who looked, listened, and marveled at the talent displayed by their progeny.

The hall was decorated with evergreens and flags. George Washington's picture was encircled with a wreath made of ground-pine, with cranberries sewn on amongst the feathery green. A crushed cranberry, which had torn itself away from the restraining thread, now rested in a semi-dried condition just over Washington's nose, and the Father of his Country appeared to be suffering with a ripe carbuncle.

The high-backed chair, upholstered with a green-and-yellow corduroy, had been removed from the centre of the platform to the lower corner at the

left. On the opposite side was an upright piano which Porky Thompson had lent for the occasion, his daughter Florence being one of the performers. Porky was in the front row with Mrs. Porky. He smiled and sat expansively, and Mrs. Porky twitched nervously, as she worried about the "joo-ett" Florence was to play with Ethel Ashby.

Jim Trefethen was chairman, and his lanky form was almost lost in the gorgeous cavern of the chair he occupied.

The clock on the wall at the other end of the room struck eight, and the audience looked up expectantly at Jim. Some boys in the rear began to clap and stamp. Giving a preliminary cough, Jim stood up.

"Ladies and Gentlemen: It gives me real pleasure to perform the office of chairman for this entertainment, for I firmly believe that I am introducing an array of talent that might be called a galaxy of stars. I also feel great pleasure in having a chance to sit in this chair, which is usually honored with the weight of our friend, the president of the lodge, Mr. William Thompson, who runs the best meat-store in the State of Maine." (Applause.)

Jim picked up a written sheet of paper from the small table beside the chair and continued:

"The first number on the program is 'Selec-

tions,' by the Orpheus Quartette of Peacedale: same quartette being Charley Davis [Applause], Mickey Lewis [Applause], Sam Turnbull [Applause], and Tom Donovan [Applause]. These Orpheus—Orpheuses—or, I guess I'd better call 'em Orphans, are a fine bunch of boys; and while I leave you all free to form your own estimation of their singing, I feel it my duty to warn all the girls to keep their hearts firmly anchored, else they'll be in danger of drifting towards this platform; and, as there are only four Orphans, they being a quartette, some hearts might get stepped on."

The "Orphans" mounted the platform with sheepish blushes, awkward gait, and four mandolins. They seated themselves in a row, solemnly facing the audience, and began a medley of popular songs which they tinkled and twanged to a grand finale of "Yankee Doodle." There was wild applause.

They stood up and laid their mandolins on the chairs. Each youth clung to a buttonhole of his vest. For a few seconds they looked as if they were going to whistle, but they opened their mouths in various shapes and sang. Charley Davis's mouth looked like the Mammoth Cave of Kentucky; Sam Turnbull's lips formed a triangle; Mickey Lewis vocalized through an oval aperture; and Tom Don-

ovan's rolling bass boomed through a horizontal slit. "Stars of the Summer Night" was beautifully done, after which they sang all about "Seeing Nellie Home."

Every one applauded as they picked up their mandolins and stumbled from the platform. Jim put the chairs aside.

"I'd like a few volunteers from the front to help sweep up these hearts," he remarked; and the four "Orphans" blushed again, while several maidens tittered.

Little Mollie Andrews, with petticoats starched and stiffened until they flared out like ballet skirts, and hair frizzed like a Circassian, was "the next thing on the program." With a cheerful, piping voice she recited a heart-rending account of "The Wreck of the Mary Ann," in which all souls on board, including a brave little stowaway, perished. Being encored most vociferously, she flaunted her skirts and gave the audience the happy information that "Little Willie's playing Harps among the Angels Now." It being inferred that Little Willie and the unnamed stowaway were one and the same, the audience rejoiced to learn that his death in the briny deep had resulted in his becoming a celestial musician.

Jim stood up again and read: "The next is a

song by Miss Eva Anderson. Eva has singing lessons in Portland, and I hear that Tetrizzini is going out of the singing business. Can't stand the competition now that Eva's coming out. Oh, er—the name of the song is, 'Du bist wie eine Blume.' That's German; and I asked Eva what it meant. Now, my memory's a bit weak on German, but I have a kind of lingering in my mind that '*du bist wie eine blume*' is Dutch for 'You're a daisy.' The accompaniment will be played by Miss Florence Thompson, a young lady who contributes much talent to the pride of Peacedale."

Eva's encore was "Star of My Heart." Jim facetiously remarked that Eva's heart must be like a firmament; and he dared the star she was referring to in her song—the fixed star—to stand up.

"Twinkle, twinkle, little star!" called out Teddy Hale.

"Mr. Basil Hastings will now favor us with piano selections; three pieces, which alone will be worth the price of your tickets," announced Jim. "The first piece is called 'Butterfly Ee-tood'; the second is a 'Ballad in a flat,' which I suppose is an imitation of some one singing a song in one of those flat-houses in New York, where folks live in a heap like ants. The third piece is—'Pa—Pas——' Well, I just can't make out the name, but, whatever

it is, it'll be worth hearing." Jim sat down, visibly relieved.

Basil mounted the steps and carefully propped his crutch against a chair near the piano.

"Land's sakes! he's forgot to bring his music!" said Mrs. Porky in a shrill whisper; and a responsive "Oh!" of sympathy echoed over the room.

Basil smiled and began Chopin's "Butterfly Etude." It seemed as if gauzy-winged butterflies were fluttering through the air; butterflies of all colors,—dainty, iris-hued visions.

"Play it again! Again! Encore!" called out the audience, when he paused at the end. He complied; and then came the well-known "Ballade in A-flat."

Porky Thompson was like a martyr stretched on a rack when Basil played the fortissimo passages.

"Susie," he whispered to his wife, "that piano ain't going to stand treatment of that sort. The boy'll be banging the insides out of it in a minute!"

However, the piano bore up bravely and reached the brilliant end of the Ballade without collapsing. When the applause had died down Basil rattled through Gottschalk's "Pasquinade." They all liked that, and they wouldn't let him leave the piano until he had finished it for the third time.

"Try it again, boy!" called Porky Thompson, completely carried away with enthusiasm. "Them strings will stand it."

"Our well-known and highly-esteemed friend, Mr. Mickey Lewis, will now favor us with a recitation, 'The Charge of the Light Brigade,'" read Jim.

The boys cheered, stamped, and clapped as the blushing Mickey, whose face bore a strong resemblance to that of a monkey, ascended the steps. He faced the audience manfully, both hands thrust into his coat-pockets.

"Give it to 'em, Mickey," advised Jim when the noise had subsided.

It was a tragical-comical effort, for Mickey, with his funny ugly face, should never have attempted anything serious. The risibilities of his boy friends were stirred up to the point of ridicule by the time he reached the end of the first stanza, but Mickey stood by his guns and charged nobly against the jeering comments of the enemy. Every time he paused for breath the boys would hoot and yell: "Go it, Mickey!"—"Shoot 'em down!"—"Colonel Mickey Lewis."—"Mickey the Martyr."—"Listen to our Special War Correspondent!"

"'Cannon to right of them,'" declaimed Mickey.

"BANG!" yelled the boys.

"Look out, Mickey, you'll get shot!" shouted some one.

" ' Cannon to left of them.' "

" Bang, *bang*, BANG!" they yelled.

Mickey shook his fist at his tormentors: " ' Cannon behind them.' "

" Bow-wow-wow-wow! meow-meow — ssisst!" volleyed and thundered the back row.

" ' Stormed at with shot and shell,' " Mickey continued; and rode on with the noble Six Hundred to the very end.

The cheers and cat-calls were deafening. Mickey remained on the platform, looking so solemn that a hush fell over the room, and every one looked up with a half-shamed expectancy. A good-natured smile shone over his ugly face, and he gave his celebrated imitation of a monkey, returning to his seat while the audience applauded rapturously.

" You're all right, Mickey," said Jim. " You've got the spunk of the Six Hundred in you; and as long as you can twist your face so that you look as if Adam and Eve's grandparents might have been monkeys, your glory will never fade in Peacedale."

Percy Plantagenet Potts followed with a vocal solo. Percy was a delicate boy of nine, the son of the burly blacksmith of Peacedale. In her youthful days Percy's mother had admired a hero in a

novel which had given her maiden heart many a throb; and years afterwards she had bestowed his name, Percy Plantagenet, on her frail offspring. Percy was a fair, weak-eyed boy, and wore spectacles with lenses that gave him the appearance of looking through two plate-glass windows. His eyes were blue and bulgy, and the eyelids looked as if they had been buttonholed with pink silk. To-night his hair was "slicked down" with much oil and energetic brushing; but one refractory lock, a veritable "cowlick," persisted in standing on end on the crown of his head.

When Percy went up on the platform, his adoring mother looked up with the rapt expression of a saint engaged in prayer. Big, brawny Tom Potts tried to bury his face in his flannel collar, and perspired as if he were working over his forge.

Percy's song was a romantic ditty, one of his mother's favorites in her girlhood. Florence Thompson nervously tinkled out the introductory measures, and Percy chimed in, only four notes behind. However, Florence obligingly waited at the end of the sixth measure until he caught up.

Percy warbled:

"You said good-by, the parting words were spoken.
I leave you now, perhaps 'tis better so.
I give you back each tender, loving token,
And far across the seas now I will go.

Call me backa—gain,
Call me backa—gain;
Ah! when your love has conquered pri—dan—
dangger,
I know that you will call me backa—gain.”

They called him back again, and he sang with much sentiment, “Wait till the Clouds Roll by, Jennie.”

“Now we draw a prize!” proclaimed Jim. “Duet, ‘Annie Laurie’ with variations, played by Miss Florence Thompson and Miss Ethel Ashby.”

Under the guidance of Ethel, Annie Laurie tripped lightly over the bass and justified the poet’s description of her footfall; for it was “like dew on gowan lying.” Then she skimmed up to the treble, where Florence seized her and whirled her about until she was breathless and dizzy. Panic-stricken, the unfortunate Annie sought refuge in the bass, where she wailed and moaned in a minor key. After that the two girls played a tug-of-war with their victim. Florence pulled her up, Ethel pulled her down; and when they had succeeded in stretching her out the full length of the keyboard, they hammered at her with octaves. Finally she disappeared altogether beneath an avalanche of crashing chords. Then, at an unexpected moment, she turned up in a mutilated condition in the deepest depths of the bass. Florence hauled her out and

strangled her with arpeggios. With a wild shriek of trills, Annie Laurie made one weak effort to elude her captors. They chased her up and down the piano until they seized her in the neighborhood of middle C. They proceeded to crush the life out of her with fortissimo chords, and at length, with a wild scream, she expired on the topmost note of the treble. Two loud chords in the bass silenced her forever.

"Susie," Porky Thompson whispered again to his wife, "our Floss got just about as much noise out of that machine as young Hastings did."

Jim stood up. "The next is a song by Miss Ida Lemon of Portland, who is visiting friends in Peacedale."

Miss Lemon was a pretty brunette, and sang two songs with engaging charm.

When the applause for her encore had ended, Jim said in his whimsical way: "Hitherto apples have been my favorite fruit; but I must say that Miss Ida is the sweetest lemon I have ever seen."

"Wouldn't you like to be a squeezer?" called out Teddy Hale.

Several children appeared in songs, recitations, and tableaux, after which the concert ended with "Just a Song at Twilight," sung by the Orpheus Quartette. Then Jim announced that the receipts

for the evening amounted to twenty-four dollars and sixty-five cents, and would be expended in books for the library at the Academy.

“And now,” he added, “I want to thank all our artists for having given their services, and also the audience for their kind attention and appreciation.”

Every one was happy and all the parents were proud; but perhaps the proudest, happiest woman in the room was Ma when her tall husband joined her and said, “By gum! I’m glad that’s over!”

CHAPTER XIV

TONI KNITS A DREAM-STOCKING

THE day after Toni's visit to the pawnbroker, Jacob Seiffertitz, Mr. Hastings had sent for Cecily and Basil to come to him in his study.

When Cecily returned to her bedroom where she had left Toni, her cheeks were aflame, and her eyes were shining with joyful excitement.

"He's wonderful!" she cried. "He's a wax angel! Just see what he has given me!" She waved two bright, new bills in the air. "And Basil has the same."

Toni's eyes widened and her mouth opened with astonishment.

"We went to the study," continued Cecily, "with tear and frembling—I mean fear and trembling; and he was perfectly dear. He said that we were all to have an allowance; two-fifty a month. And he gave us each fifteen dollars, back dues and some in advance. When we tried to thank him he became quite nasty, and changed from an angel into a demon. In fact, he almost ordered us out of the

room. Told us to be off. But never mind! Now I can do some Christmas shopping!" She whirled about the room.

Toni clasped her hands. "We'll all go over to Portland together; you, Basil, and I. We can take a car from the station and Basil can manage to walk about the stores. Oh, joy! I haven't done half my shopping. I have to get some more reed to finish making those baskets; but I don't intend to make the fudge for filling them until the last moment, as I want it to be perfectly fresh."

"And we must put in some duts and nates with the fudge—I mean nuts and dates," went on Cecily. "Now I am going to make a list of the presents I intend to buy."

Two days before Christmas, Toni went to the kitchen to make the fudge.

"Not that I hold with folks messing in the kitchen where they don't belong," observed Delia. "But you ain't been much trouble since you come here, so I guess I don't mind."

"Now wish me luck, Delia!" cried Toni, as she began to mix the ingredients. "Are you going to hang up your stocking, Delia?" she asked presently.

"No, I can't abide such foolishness. If the Lord intends to open the hearts of folks so that

they'll give you a present, He'll do it without being reminded by seeing your stocking hanging up. The old gentleman, meaning your grandfather, always gives me a ten-dollar bill; and the two ladies, meaning your aunts, gives me money, too. That's the presents I always get."

"What does your sweetheart give you?" Toni's eyes twinkled.

Delia grunted. "Sweetheart! As my ma said with her last breath, 'Men are a trial and a tribulation whichever way you take them.' And the woman who has to do with a man will wear a hollow cheek and an empty heart; for the Lord did say out of the abundance of His heart: 'All men are liars.' That being a solemn warning to women to beware of sweethearts and husbands. For men, especially when they're husbands, will turn again and rend you, and are always trying to the flesh of them that has to deal with them. And the Lord being willing to stand by His words, has forbidden marrying in Heaven. So by not marrying myself, it seems like as if I'm helping the Lord's idea of heaven down here. For how can a woman be an angel, as the Lord intended her to be, if she has a man to deal with?"

The bulwarks of Delia's silence were swept away by a torrent of conversation when "Man" formed

the subject. Toni began to beat the frothy mixture and listened with avid enjoyment to Delia's unaccustomed loquacity.

"What *is* a man?" continued Delia, warming up. "A trouble to some woman from the day he is born until the day his widow lays him for good and all in the grave. A crape veil, for all it looks so gloomy, is a flag of freedom. The reason angels in heaven *are* angels is that there ain't any men up there, spillin' ashes from their pipes, and droppin' burnt matches all over the place, and forgettin' to wipe their muddy shoes. There's no sense in men, unless it's nonsense; for men are, indeed, but contradictionary creatures; and a man around the house is a determinated nuisance. No wedding bells for me!"

Delia delivered the final sentence with an attitude of defiance, as if she were holding at bay hosts of imploring suitors. She relapsed into silence, and Toni continued to beat the fudge, which began to assume a thick, creamy consistency.

"I met Mandy Fly in the post-office yesterday," Delia presently began. "She's 'most as bad as any man! And she says how our cat ain't pure Persian. Pure Persian, indeed! I just up and told her that the Lord knew what He was doing when He made our cat, even if He did do it without her

help; and it *was* pure Persian, for there warn't nothing wrong with its purr. Our cat can purr as well as any cat I ever knew. Pure Persian!"

Toni laughed as she poured the fudge into several pans and set it to cool on a shelf in the pantry. She then went up-stairs to tie up some of her Christmas parcels.

The children had seen little of their grandfather since the day he had given Cecily and Basil their allowance. Occasionally he joined them at the table, but at such times his manner was austere and forbidding, and he usually had his meals sent to his study. They met him a few times when he was taking his customary stroll in the garden, but their greetings elicited only surly responses from him.

Toni ventured into his study that afternoon, and requested permission to have Cæsar Silas cut down a tree in the Hastings woods.

"Tree? What for?" snarled Grandfather, looking up from his writing.

"A Christmas tree! And Aunt Olivia says we may put it up in that small parlor leading off the living-room. It won't be in any one's way there, and won't upset the house at all."

"Bah! Christmas tree! You're too old for such mummary. Christmas trees are for babies. Tommyrot!"

"Too old!" echoed Toni. "Why, no, Grandfather! No one is too old for a Christmas tree. Now, do say yes; because there is going to be something on the tree for you. For, of course, you are coming to the party."

"I don't want my trees cut down. It will spoil the woods," he replied.

"Cæsar Silas says that the far corner of the wood-lot needs thinning; and we have selected the dearest tree! Oh, do say yes! And you'll realize that you aren't too old for Christmas trees when the wonderful night arrives."

He looked up at her pleading face. There was something irresistible about Toni's coaxing.

"Parlor off the living-room, eh?" He rubbed his spectacles.

"Yes. We thought of that room because Aunt Priscilla couldn't go up-stairs."

"Ahem! Well, have your tree there then; and be off! Don't bother me with any more childishness." He frowned and resumed his writing.

"Thank you, Grandfather," said Toni meekly, and she tiptoed out of the room.

That night the girls finished wrapping and tying up their presents. Basil was down-stairs in Aunt Priscilla's room, reading aloud to the two aunts.

"There! the last one!" Cecily cut the red cord.

Their beds were littered with packages, a few of which were wrapped and stamped for mailing. The others were done up in white tissue-paper and tied with holly ribbon. On the table were letters and cards. Cecily gathered them in a neat pile.

"I've written all my Christmas letters and cards! Have you, Toni?"

"All but Dad's; and I'm going to write that now," was Toni's response as she searched for the scissors.

"I put my letter to Dad in with the box of presents. Now I'm going down-stairs to Aunt Priscilla's room, to hear some of Stevenson's 'Silverado Squatters.' Come down when you're finished." Cecily left the room.

Toni took a sheet of thick red paper, one side of which was white. She carefully cut out the pattern of a stocking and proceeded to write on the under-side. Her fingers were bruised and badly scratched, and there were smudges of resin on her hands; for the previous evening she had assisted in decorating St. Stephen's church for the Christmas services.

This paper stocking was a quaint little conceit of her own, her Christmas letter to her father so far away. She began at the top with unusually neat

penmanship, and wrote on until she reached the toe without a blot.

DEAR OLD DADDY:

This is your Christmas stocking, filled from *toe* to *knee* with the love of Toni. When you glance inside, look "not with the eyes but with the mind," because it is a dream-stockings.

First comes a Box of Kisses, Toni-twolips flavor; guaranteed by the pure love and heart act.

Second, a Bundle of Hugs, wrapped in soft little squeezes and firmly sealed with loving pinches.

Third, a magic Bag o' Dreams. It is made of a rainbow, and the contents are inexhaustible. Many of the Dreams contain prizes; golden Hopes. If these Hopes should ever become tarnished (they sometimes do), put them back into the rainbow bag for a while, and they will shine again like golden stars.

In all the little corners and spaces of the stocking are loving thoughts and wishes, like loose beads scattered everywhere. Draw a rainbow thread from the bag and string these beads for a charm. It will banish loneliness from your heart and give you good cheer.

Now you have reached the heel. A wonderful jewel-box is here, filled with most precious jewels—memories.

And here, right at the end of the stocking, is the heart of

TONI.

CHAPTER XV

“AND SO, AS TINY TIM OBSERVED,
‘GOD BLESS US EVERY ONE!’”

ON the morning before Christmas Day, Cæsar Silas brought in the tree and placed it in the bay-window of the parlor which adjoined the living-room. The three young people spent most of the afternoon in decorating the tree and arranging the presents in piles on the floor, at the base of the sturdy hemlock.

Toni put some pine boughs and dried chestnut-burrs in the grate, where a huge log was laid, ready for the fire that evening.

“I do hope Grandfather will be nice and join us to-night,” she remarked, as she flicked her hands together, trying to rub off some resinous pine-needles.

“Aunt Priscilla is quite excited over the tree; and even Aunt Olivia is warming up a little,” said Basil.

“Delia is becoming positively talkative,” laughed

Toni. "And Cæsar Silas condescended to exchange a few remarks with me this morning."

The tree being finished, Basil went up-stairs to practise, and the girls went out to deliver their gifts. They left a parcel with Ma, giving her strict injunctions that it was not to be opened until the following morning. They also gave Ma a present for poor Rachel Lee, whom Ma always had with her on Christmas Day.

"I just couldn't relish my dinner, thinking of that poor creature sitting by herself," Ma told the girls. "So I coax her over here, and after dinner is done, Jim plays the three hymns he knows over and over on the organ. The poor soul seems to like that."

At the rectory Cecily left a book for her friend Kathryn, and one of the baskets filled with toothsome dainties. They then distributed simple gifts among all those who had shown them any kindness since they came to Peacedale. These gifts consisted of the reed baskets they had made and dyed, filled with fudge, nuts, dates, and raisins, with cards of merry greeting tied on with bright ribbons.

When they first started on their rounds, they passed Jim, driving his big sleigh. Mickey Lewis and Charley Davis were with him, and stood up in

the sleigh, supporting a huge object covered with canvas.

"I'm moving a house," called out Jim; and he urged Polly Feemus to "get along."

It was dusk when they returned home. The living-room was cheery with dancing firelight and the steady glow of the lamp on the supper-table. Aunt Priscilla sat near the fire.

"Humph! Your grandfather said you were to go to his study as soon as you came in. Basil is there."

They entered the study and saw three forms bent over one of Mr. Hastings's cabinets.

Toni gave a joyful cry. "Lex! Lex!"

"We thought you wouldn't be able to come until to-morrow!" added Cecily in pleased tones.

Lex was flushed and happy. "Mr. Hastings has been a sort of fairy-godfather. He drove out to Barber's farm this afternoon and managed in some wonderful way to have me set free. So here I am for a holiday of three days."

"Hurray!" cheered Toni.

When supper was finished, they all went into the room of mystery, as Toni called the small parlor. Delia and her father also came in from the kitchen to receive their presents from the tree.

Toni and Lex went into the room first, in order

to light the candles. A rapturous cry from Toni made Cecily and Basil tingle with impatience until the word came from Lex that they might enter. Something—big, black, and shiny, stood in one corner of the room near the window. Cecily gave a little squeal of delight, and Basil almost dropped his crutch on the floor.

“That is what Jim had on his sleigh this afternoon, when he said he was moving a house!” exclaimed Cecily.

“It’s a Steinway! Oh, Grandfather!” cried Basil.

Their joyful exclamations of thanks seemed to irritate the old man, who “boshed” and “bahed” all their speeches; and they were wise enough to express their gratitude by means of smiling faces and sparkling eyes.

Aunt Priscilla suggested that Basil should play something, for she saw that the boy was aching to touch the gleaming ivory keys. He sat down at once and began the old Christmas carol, “God rest ye, Merry Gentlemen.” Lex and the two girls sang, and presently Aunt Olivia joined with a sweet contralto.

“Humph!” grunted Aunt Priscilla at the end. “You still have some voice left, Olivia, though it’s many a year since I heard you sing.”

Then they sang some rollicking songs, and Toni capered about the room in a frenzy of joy. Grandfather and the two aunts were rather bewildered at the mirth and frivolity of the young people.

Cæsar Silas, having refused a seat, stood like a mute at a funeral. His "Much obliged" was uttered in gloomy accents, so that Toni afterwards declared he spoke as a voice from the tomb. Delia was equally stolid and forbidding, but the splendor of her bright green velvet dress belied the solemnity of her manner. To be sure, the dress was old and had shed its pile in sundry places, but its hue was intensely vivid, and a bunch of artificial roses added a striking touch of red to the verdant background.

There were gifts for every one: packages of all shapes and sizes, wrapped in white and in holly paper, all mysterious and bearing the official seal of Santa Claus, with the regulation command, "Do not open until Christmas morning."

Toni was able to guess at the contents of one parcel which fell to her share, for the accompanying card bore an inscription—"Greetings from Jacob Seiffertitz." How dear and thoughtful of Grandfather to redeem the things she had pawned and to return them to her in this way!

"Of course it is against the rules of Christmas-

tide to open the presents to-night," proclaimed Cecily. "We must keep them until morning, so that the day will begin with a real Christmas *ziz*, as Toni calls it."

"The night before Christmas is the magic time," said Toni. "There is a wonderful sense of anticipation then. Christmas Day itself is rather flat, I think. It is usually a day of depression and indigestion."

After the two servants had left the room, Toni suddenly realized that Grandfather had omitted his customary after-supper smoke.

"Oh, Grandfather, your pipe! How stupid of me!" And she rushed off to his study for his pipe and the jar of tobacco.

"There!" she exclaimed when the pipe was lighted and little curls of smoke fluttered and faded over Grandfather's head. "Now, everybody settle down cozily, for we are going to cast a spell of Christmas enchantment over you all. This is the chief part of the party, and is our old-time observance of Christmas Eve. Turn out all the lights but this shaded reading-lamp, Cecily. Lex, put another log on the fire. I'm going to pull up the blinds. It is a wonderful night outside, all aglitter with stars and frosty moonlight. A real Christmas Eve, a holy night!"

Soon everything was arranged as she suggested. The shade on the lamp was turned so that the glow was concentrated on the pages of an open book lying on the table; and the room was lighted only by the fitful flickering of the fire and streams of silvery moonlight from the windows.

"Now the stage is set. Begin, Basil," said Toni, as she seated herself on a stool near Cecily's chair.

Basil smiled and leaned over the open book as he began: "Marley was dead, to begin with. There was no doubt whatever about that."

The boy read on and on, with an untiring voice, the tender, whimsical story of Scrooge: the dearest, sweetest Christmas story ever written, "A Christmas Carol."

The flames leapt up with a joyous crackle, and sent little flutters of light over the wreaths of holly, making them shine as if the indefatigable Delia had polished each leaf and berry separately. In a dim corner of the room lurked a mysterious shimmer of moonlight, which looked weird enough to be the ghost of Marley himself.

Through the windows could be seen glimpses of snow, brilliant with silvery radiance. Above the trees the deep purple sky was spangled with stars, as the Eastern sky must have been long ago, when

angels appeared to the shepherds who watched in the fields by night.

Sometimes passing sleighs made the air sing with a joyous sound of bells, a real Christmas jingle. The ocean boomed and rolled like a majestic organ in the cathedral of the world.

Other spirits than those mentioned in the story wandered into the room and drifted into the hearts where they belonged: the French 'Toinette, the children's mother; Lex's mother; and others whose memories were vague and dreamy, like the faint, half-forgotten perfume of flowers that had blossomed and faded long ago.

Far away in a prison cell sat a lonely man, gazing through the high window which formed a frame for a square of starry sky. On a small shelf-like table beside him were a few books, some sprays of holly, and some open letters; but the man held in his fingers a quaint little paper stocking, Toni's Christmas letter. His thoughts bridged the weary distance that separated him from his children, and he joined the little band of memory-ghosts gathered about the fireside far away.

And all the world over, wherever the spirit of Christmas cheer dwells, wherever hearts thrill and glow with a universal love that springs from peace and good-will towards all men, there were echoes

and reëchoes of Tiny Tim's prayer. In many hearts the little prayer included the beloved memory of Charles Dickens.

“And so, as Tiny Tim observed, ‘ *God Bless Us, Every One!* ’ ”

CHAPTER XVI

LIFE DARKENS

It was a bleak January afternoon, with a dense fog drifting in from the sea. Cecily, Toni, and Kathryn Lindsay were pulling their sleds up Brimson's hill, which afforded the best place in Peacedale for coasting. The road began in front of Brimson's house and made a wide, sweeping curve around the corner, where Sawyer's general store stood at the foot of the hill.

A few girls and boys were gathered at the top, and Teddy Hale came swooping down with loud shouts of warning to the three girls, who stood aside as he flashed by.

"There aren't many coasting to-day," observed Cecily, as she paused to mop her eyes and nose with a handkerchief. "I really shouldn't have come out myself, for I have a horrid, sniffly cold coming on."

On reaching the summit they found the girls and boys talking together in a group.

"Hello!" called Kathryn and Toni; but their informal salutation met with sickly smiles from the

girls. The boys, with embarrassed faces, came back to their sleds.

"Girls make me tired!" ejaculated Bobby Sterling. "Come on, Toni; let's have a bob together."

"Suppose we have one great, long bob, the whole crowd of us," suggested Toni. And she called to the others, "Come, girls, for a glorious ride together!"

They shook their heads. Iola Burtis turned her back and began to talk excitedly. Florence Thompson started towards Toni; and then, after a moment's hesitation, turned and walked slowly down the hill with her sled. Kathryn made a funny little grimace and began to hitch her sled to Toni's. By this time Teddy Hale had ascended the hill. He cast a glance of scorn towards the group.

"What is the matter with the girls?" asked Toni.

"Yes," added Kathryn. "They look at us as if we were outcasts. What is wrong?"

"I'd like to wash Iola Burtis's face with snow," observed Billy Talbot. "I'd like to wring her neck—the conceited little popinjay!"

He tied his sled to Cecily's with an extra knot, giving the cord such a strenuous twist that he seemed to be carrying out his desire to wreak dam-

age to the fair pedestal on which Iola's pretty, empty head rested.

"Girls make me tired," repeated Bobby with disgust.

"On behalf of girls, let me thank you for your delightfully expressed sentiments," said Toni with a merry laugh, as she sat on her sled behind Bobby's.

Before Teddy gave the final push that sent the bob skimming down the hill, he called out in derisive tones: "Chase yourselves home, girls! Ask your mothers to rock you to sleep."

When they returned for another descent the girls had left.

"Suffering cats!" exclaimed Teddy. "I'm glad they've gone. The day is cold enough without having their frosty faces before us."

"What can have happened?" questioned Cecily. "They didn't act in that queer way at school. Do you know what it is?" she asked, turning to the boys.

Bobby became intensely interested in making a snowball, which he hurled with all his strength at a neighboring tree.

Teddy looked at Billy. "Well," he began in an abashed way, "it's some crazy notion Iola has in her noddle. She's a silly little cuckoo."

"Aw, come on; let's forget it," advised Billy; and they wisely did as he suggested.

The next morning, when Kathryn reached the Academy, she found Iola Burtis holding a conclave in the cloak-room. Several girls were grouped about her, listening with awed, bewildered expressions. She spoke with an air of importance, as she pulled out and patted the blue bow which was poised in her curls, over her right ear, like an aëroplane caught in a tree-top.

"How perfectly appalling!" cried Ethel Ashby.

"It's simply disgraceful," finished Iola; and she pulled down the front of her belt and smoothed her skirt over her hips.

Kathryn blinked through her spectacles and approached the others.

"What is appalling? What is disgraceful?" she inquired.

She was greeted with a chorus of remarks and exclamations.

"Don't all speak at once!" she cried. "I can get no sense out of your gibberish. Jail? Prison? Thief? What *are* you talking about?"

"It's simply this," snapped Iola. "Cecily and Toni's father is in prison. He's a convict!"

"And their name isn't Hastings at all. It's

Hamilton," added Florence Thompson with tearful eyes.

"Wh-wh-what *are* you trying to tell me?" stammered Kathryn. "You're crazy. You've all gone dippy."

"It's absolutely true." Iola gave her head a scornful toss, which left her bow wobbling precariously. "Their father is in prison."

"I don't believe it," rejoined Kathryn bluntly. "And anyway, Iola Burtis, you're a sniveling little sneak to spread this story about. You ought to be ashamed of yourself! That's what ailed you yesterday, on Brimson's hill, wasn't it?"

"Well, I think it's perfectly awful for Toni and Cecily, with all their citified clothes and ways, to think they can associate with respectable people like us." Myrtle Toner spoke with two hairpins in her mouth, while she adjusted her hair.

"You miserable creature," hissed Kathryn. "Respectable people, indeed! Cecily and Toni are just as good as any of you, and a great sight better than some."

"The daughters of a thief," sneered Iola. "I don't see how they dare come near honest folks."

Kathryn turned. "I wish we were boys, Iola. I'd smash your face for saying that!"

"You're a nice sort of girl for a clergyman's daughter." Iola spoke with a scoffing smile.

"A clergyman's daughter," repeated Kathryn, and her eyes flashed sparks through her spectacles. "Well, I don't have to walk round like a haloed saint just because I happen to be the daughter of a clergyman. I'm human first. As for you, Iola Burtis, you're nothing but a pie-faced snip."

"At any rate, I'm not the daughter of a convict, like your friend, Cecily," retorted Iola.

"Oh!" exclaimed Florence, looking towards the door.

They all turned and beheld Cecily and Toni standing just inside. Toni's face was pale, but she faced them all with a steadfast gaze. Kathryn rushed over to Cecily and seized her hand.

"Since you don't believe us, you'd better ask your friends where their father is!" advised Iola with a vinegary simper.

"Shut up!" Kathryn replied with more force than elegance.

Toni slowly removed her outdoor things. "I—I—heard what you said, Iola, as we entered the room," she began. "It is quite true; our father is—in—prison. But he is innocent; and I'm as proud of him now as I should be if he were President of the United States."

"Then why did you drop his name and call yourselves Hastings?" jerrered Iola.

"Such outrageous deception!" sniffed Myrtle.

"You must have been proud of him when you did that," added Iola.

"It is no concern of yours, you interfering cats!" said Kathryn indignantly.

Toni stopped her with a gesture. "We did not drop our father's name because we were ashamed of him. When we came to live with our grandfather, it was his wish that we should take his name."

"H'm! I guess he thought people wouldn't get wise to the fact that your father was in prison. It's a great thing to be proud of, I must say," scoffed Iola.

Toni closed her eyes for a second, as if to shut out the jeering face of her tormentor. "I don't intend to discuss the matter with you any farther. You know my father is a convict. I know he is innocent. That is all I have to say." She gathered up her books.

"Perhaps Cecily will speak now," suggested Iola with forced sweetness.

Some of the girls giggled, and Cecily looked at them with tear-filled eyes.

"Aa-aa—chee—hoo!" sneezed Cecily, to the astonishment of all. "I think you are all—



"WE DID NOT DROP OUR FATHER'S NAME BECAUSE WE WERE
ASHAMED OF HIM." — *Page 206.*

aachoo!—very unkind—aachoo!—to make fun of our misfortune. It isn't our fault!"

Florence Thompson unexpectedly entered the fray. "Yes, Cecily is right. It *is* unkind! It's mean—dirty mean. I like Cecily and Toni, and I'm not going to change because of this trouble. I'm with Kathryn, on their side."

"Just listen to Floss! Feeble Flossie has the floor!" cried Iola.

"Speak again, Flossie!" urged Myrtle.

"Oh, eat my hat!" was the meek Flossie's inelegant reply.

The gong rang for assembling the classes, and the meeting in the cloak-room ended abruptly.

The morning seemed endless to Cecily and Toni. The sad story had evidently circulated through the school, thanks to the efforts of Iola and Myrtle.

"How can we go back this afternoon and face them all?" cried Cecily as they went home for dinner. "The class-room this morning seemed full of eyes—jeering, scornful, and pitying!"

Toni sighed. "You'd better stay home, Cecily. Your cold is getting worse all the time."

Cecily stamped her foot on the hard snow. "Stay home and let you face it all alone? Not much—I mean, not much! I'm going to face it out with you, cold or no cold. Aa—chee—hoo!"

The following day her cold was much worse, but she insisted on accompanying Toni to school. They walked in with Lex, and, as they passed a group of boys, they overheard Fred Simmons call out under his breath, "Jail-birds!"

Lex's face whitened and his jaws clenched. "Girls, go on to school, and take my books with you, please."

He handed them their books with his own.

"Oh, but Lex ——" protested Toni.

"Oh! blease don'd fide!" poor Cecily's voice was a blurred whisper.

"Go on, *please!*" insisted Lex.

He was late for school that morning, and Fred did not put in an appearance until the next day. Lex's shabby Norfolk jacket was torn, and there was a scratch on his left cheek. For several days Fred's chastened demeanor and black eye were marveled at by all; but neither he nor Lex said anything beyond the apology which Fred blushinglly uttered to Cecily and Toni.

"It was a snide thing for me to say," said Fred, shuffling his feet. "And I'm sorry."

Cecily's cold developed into a severe attack of influenza, and she was obliged to stay at home for two weeks under Aunt Olivia's care. A bed was put up for her in her aunt's room; and the invalid was

petted and waited upon with unfailing kindness, for Aunt Olivia was an ideal nurse.

Nothing was said to Basil about their father's misfortune being known in Peacedale. The girls kept their own counsel, and the affair was not mentioned at home. Daily poor Toni armed herself with all the courage at her command and faced the glances of her schoolmates. She no longer joined the merry skating and coasting parties, though Kathryn, Florence, and the boys urged her to do so. Even Lex remonstrated with her.

"Don't let this trouble spoil you, Toni. You've been such a brick all along. Be your own merry self and join the others in some fun. All the decent ones want you. They admire you for your courage. Let the others go to Ballywhack! Rotten cads!"

Toni gave him a sad little smile. "Oh, Lex! I haven't the heart for fun! By the time I have finished with the classes my courage has all oozed away, and I want to run into some corner and hide from every one."

One Thursday morning Ma was getting dinner ready when she heard the gate close; and, looking out the window, she saw Toni coming up the path. She opened the door before Toni had time to knock, and uttered an exclamation of dismay when she saw the girl's white, set face.

"Land's sakes, Toni! what is the matter?" she cried, and began to unbutton her coat.

"May I stay and have dinner with you, Ma?" asked Toni.

"Stay? I should say so! Jim'll be the gayest man in Peacedale when he comes home and finds you here. You're a great favorite of Jim's. Now you just sit right down by the stove and warm yourself. It's a nasty, raw day; and for mean weather in winter, Maine weather is the meanest, Jim says." Ma bustled about with her preparations.

"Jim and I always have our meals in the kitchen when we are alone. It's cheerful and warm, and saves me some stepping," she went on. "And, by good luck, I just happened to bake a fresh batch of pies this morning instead of to-morrow. Ah! here's Jim! He's never late."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" exclaimed Jim when he saw Toni. "How's that three-cornered piano at your place? It's just about the size and shape of a lot in Portland that Sam Hooper used to have his pig-pen on, and he sold it for five hundred dollars last week."

"Dinner's ready," announced Ma, and they drew up to the table.

"What ails you, Toni? You're looking

quite peckish," began Jim, as he passed her a plate of savory stew with a snowy, light dumpling.

"Never mind, Jim! You just eat your dinner, Toni," admonished Ma.

"Yes, Toni, eat away. You just put that dumpling out o' sight or it'll float away. And you don't get Ma's dumplings every day. The dumplings some folks make could be used as anchors for ocean liners; but Ma's dumplings wouldn't hold down a wisp o' thistle-down."

"They are delicious," responded Toni. "But I—I—can't eat!" She buried her face in her hands and began to sob convulsively. "Oh, I can't stand it! I can't stand it!"

Jim laid his knife and fork down in complete bewilderment. Ma drew her chair beside Toni's. "Just cry it out, my dear," she said soothingly. "Go on with your dinner, Jim."

"Dinner be blowed!" rejoined Jim. "What's the trouble, little girl? Your grandfather hasn't been mean with you, has he?"

"Oh, no! It's ——"

The sad story came out with fresh tears, but at the end Toni recovered her composure.

"It is so terrible to have them slurring my father; to feel that the world looks upon him as a criminal,

and I can do nothing. I'm not even allowed to bear his name. My dear, kind old Dad! It is all a horrible mistake. But I'm such a coward. It's getting worse every day!"

"Well, you'd better stay here with Ma this afternoon," advised Jim. "She'll cheer you up. You came to the right one for comfort when you came to Ma."

"I know that," replied Toni, drying her eyes. "But I must go to school. I must! though I'm becoming more ashamed every day."

"You mustn't be ashamed, Toni," said Ma quietly. "There's nothing for you to be ashamed of. You have faith in your father. You believe he is innocent, don't you?"

"Oh, yes! yes indeed! He *is* innocent."

"Well, then, there's no shame, and you've got to hold up your head in pride and show the world that your belief in your father means something. If you thought he was guilty, you might be ashamed. But your faith should make you hope that some day everything will be set right. Sooner or later things are all evened up. It's like a difficult sum. If you work at it and don't get discouraged, the right answer is bound to come. Keep a stiff upper lip. Don't let folks think they can hurt you with their jeers. Face them bravely, and don't feel

ashamed that this story has come out. Just think that it gives you a chance to show your love for your father. He's bearing the disgrace all by himself. Be ready to take your share of the burden. Grasp your nettle bravely! He must be a good father, a good man, to have won your love. Let your love be worth having!"

"Oh, Ma! you've done me good!" cried Toni, with a smile sunning her face. "You've filled me with courage!"

"Ma's right!" said Jim. "Face it out bravely, Toni. And, see here, when you want to have a real, busting cry, just come to Ma, as you've done to-day. A good wash-out does us all good at times. And don't let those giggling schoolgirls, who haven't a thread of brains to bless themselves with, down your spirits. Let out all your canvas and sail straight through the storm. You'll weather the gale, and there's a blue sky ahead. Never fear! Be brave and gay, Toni. Get your heart tuned up for a jig, and let your spirits keep in step."

Toni put her arms about Ma and kissed her heartily. "I'm coming again, Ma, the next time you have dumplings; and I shall ask for a second one. Thank you for the comfort and the courage you've given me. These last ten days have been terrible; but I'm going to take Jim's advice, and

start my heart jiggling to a joy-tune. I'm going to be jolly, a regular Mark Tapley."

"By gum! that's it!" Jim tied his muffler about his neck. "You remember Mark Tapley, Ma? We read about him last winter. Say, he was a corker, and no mistake! Jolly? That Dickens was a man that knew the human heart and had a heart of his own. Jolly, jolly! that's the word."

CHAPTER XVII

A GREAT HOPE

AFTER Toni and Jim had gone, Ma put her kitchen in order and then carefully dressed herself in her best clothes. Her black velvet bonnet fitted closely over her white curls, and was held in place by a ribbon tied in a bow under her chin. Her dark red dress showed an inch of its skirt beneath the long coat the cuffs and collar of which were edged with fur.

Half an hour later, Delia knocked at Mr. Hastings's study.

"Come in. What is it?"

She opened the door and peered in. "Mis' Trefethen would like to see you. Something important, she says."

"Mrs. Trefethen? What does the woman want?" he asked, laying down his pen.

"I don't know; but she's got her Sunday bonnet on, and she said she'd wait if it wasn't convenient for you to see her right now."

"Show her in." He left his desk and seated himself in his usual chair before the grate.

Ma came in, trembling with excitement. Her cheeks were so flushed that the scars were almost invisible.

Mr. Hastings rose. "Ah, Mrs. Trefethen! I can spare you a few moments. Just sit down." He pointed to a chair opposite his.

"I beg your pardon for disturbing you, Mr. Hastings," she began. "But I felt I must come to see you about—Toni."

"Toni, eh? Well, just loosen your coat, Mrs. Trefethen. You will find this room rather warm. In fact, I think you had better take it off. Let me assist you."

With a gentle courtesy he laid her coat aside.

"And now," he said, resuming his seat, "what about Toni?"

"The poor child is in trouble, Mr. Hastings; and I think you ought to know about it. So I ventured to come this afternoon ——"

"In trouble? Toni in trouble?" he broke in.

"Yes. The story of her father's—difficulty has leaked out in some way, and many of the pupils at the Academy are making it hard for Toni. You know, young folks can be very heartless and cruel; and Toni's sorrow is bad enough to bear without her

being teased about it. She has always been so bright and cheerful that I can't bear to see her down-hearted; and I thought that perhaps something could be done to—to help her father; to help Toni. I hoped that you would do something." She glanced at him timidly

He frowned. "I do something? For Hamilton? The man was given a fair trial and was found guilty. He must bear the consequences. That's all."

"No, that isn't all! His children must suffer, too; and he may be innocent."

"Innocent? Bah!"

"Mr. Hastings, we all know that innocent men are often punished for crimes they never committed. Why may it not be so in this case?"

"Hamilton was given a chance to prove his innocence. He was unable to do so, and the Court adjudged him guilty. There is nothing more to be done. I am sorry this miserable story has come out. I—I don't like Toni to be in trouble. But I don't see that I can do anything. It must simply be lived down."

Ma pressed her lips firmly together. "Mr. Hastings, I am sure you haven't had Toni live with you all these weeks without learning to care for her. And you must have found out that the great love

of her life is given to her father. Now, it seems to me that when a man like Mr. Hamilton has a daughter like Toni, he simply couldn't do wrong. God wouldn't let that child's wonderful love be given to a criminal. You must know that Toni's love is worth having, for you must have gained some of it yourself by this time."

He glanced at her sharply, but she continued.

"You are a rich man. You could arrange for another trial. There must be some mistake hidden away, for justice often makes mistakes. With all the money you have, you could set folks to work to find out that mistake. You could perhaps prove that Mr. Hamilton is innocent. Wouldn't it be worth while to try? Think of the happiness you could give those three children! Just remember that this man is their father, the husband of your only child. He may be innocent! Won't you try to clear it up?"

"Suppose he isn't innocent, what then?"

"Well, you will have done your best, and your trying to prove his innocence will have won for you the love of those children. You will be the gainer, whatever comes of it. I'm just a plain, country woman, Mr. Hastings; but I know there are clever lawyers who can bring things to light that folks don't know the existence of. Now you could set

one of those lawyers to work. And if Mr. Hamilton's innocence could be proved, think of the joy of his children! Just think of the love they'd give you! It's a wonderful thing, the power you have, if you would only use it. When Toni has spoken of her father, haven't you sometimes envied him the love of her young heart? You have a chance of sharing that love." She clasped her hands and gazed at him fearlessly with her soft, motherly eyes.

"Well, well, Mrs. Trefethen, you're a good woman; but this is a foolish idea of yours, very foolish. Hamilton defied me years ago, when he persuaded my daughter to marry him. And now you ask me to aid him in establishing his innocence, to assist the man who thwarted me and stole my daughter. I'll see him rot in prison before I'll raise a finger to help him! It is quite useless for you to say anything farther."

"It may be useless," rejoined Ma quietly, "but I'm going to say it. Mr. Hastings, you are an old man. I have lived here most of my life, and I know your story. It is a sad one, but you can give it a happy ending, if you will. I know how things have gone against you and made you hard and bitter. When you were a young man at college something happened to destroy your trust in peo-

ple, and all these years you have been feeding on husks. I can remember when you brought your dear little French bride here—Toni's grandmother. I can remember her going away suddenly and dying soon after. Then her daughter, Annette, grew up. You did not understand her. She left you. Why? She needed love which you did not know how to give her. Now you have her children, and what are you going to do with them? You have made yourself think that you don't need love, that you can get along without it. You have one more chance of winning it; and it is such an easy way. Just allow yourself to be kind. I know you have it in you, but you have always tried to crush out all the better side of yourself. Take this one chance, and see what a difference it will make in your life. Just say to yourself, 'I want these children to love me. I don't care about their father; but I'll do what I can for him, just for the sake of winning their love.' We all need love, Mr. Hastings."

"We all need love, eh?" he said after a pause. "Mrs. Trefethen, I'll think over your suggestion. As you say, money can set the machinery of the law in motion; and—well, I'll think it over."

Ma rose, and he assisted her with her coat.

"Of course, Mrs. Trefethen, nothing must be said to the children about this."

"I think they should know," pleaded Ma. "It seems to me that you ought to get the credit of trying, whatever comes of it."

"The affair is so hopeless that I don't want any one, not even Toni, to know that I was fool enough to undertake it—if I should decide to do so. It will only result in failure, and Toni would feel the disgrace more keenly than she does now. It's a woman's crazy scheme; but—well, I'll think it over."

He accompanied her to the door, and when he returned to his study, he watched her go down the driveway to the gate.

"She's a good woman," he murmured; "a plain, sensible, good woman. It's a pity she lost her children, for she's the stuff that good mothers are made of."

He sat before the fire. The ruddy flames were tipped with steely-blue lights, and the brass fender mirrored the firelight in flashes of gold.

"That was a tragedy, to lose her children in that way," he mused. "But she and Jim have lived it down—and up! Plain, honest people they are, with the good-will of the whole town. They have won love. 'We all need love,' she said. Bah! That simple woman with her wonderful eyes made me think of my own mother! What a mother she

was! Ah! she died too soon! She would not have failed me, as the others did. A chance to win love!”

He lighted his pipe, and for a short time he smoked in silence.

“ I’d rather like to see Toni’s face light up for me as it does when she speaks of her father. She loves him. Did he have to win her love, I wonder, or was it given freely? H’m! Toni’s love! I believe I’ll get Jameson on the Hamilton case. If he undertook to defend the devil, he could make his Satanic Majesty appear before the eyes of the world as a white dove of purity. Let me see, I’ll go down to New York next week; the change will do me good. And I’ll talk it over with Jameson; in fact, I’ll write to him now.”

He lighted the lamp on his desk and drew out his writing-materials. When he sealed the letter he nodded with a peculiar smile.

“ H’m, the first stone turned to aid mine ancient enemy, Hamilton. Well, well, I told the good woman I’d think it over! ”

That night Kathryn Lindsay sat in the comfortable library at the rectory, studying her lessons. Mrs. Lindsay was at the same table, writing to her two sons at Princeton. Mr. Lindsay sat near them, cutting the leaves of a magazine, and he

looked over with an indulgent smile when Kathryn pushed her books away and sighed deeply.

"What is the trouble, Kitty-cat? Mathematics bothering you?" he asked.

"Oh, no, Father; the lessons are a cinch to-night."

"Really, Kathryn, now that the boys are away, there is no excuse for your adopting their slang," reproved Mrs. Lindsay. "You ought to forget it."

"*Forget it?* Oh, Mother! there's slang if you like! *Forget it!*" Kathryn laughed, but her chuckles ended in a lugubrious sigh.

"Father, why *did* you choose to be a clergyman? Why weren't you a prize-fighter, a policeman, or a stevedore instead? It's dreadfully hard to be a clergyman's daughter!"

Mr. Lindsay laid his magazine on the table. "Hard to be a clergyman's daughter, eh?"

"Yes. I'm always expected to live up to your reputation, and look pious and holy, as if I were an infant saint. It's simply awful to be obliged to go through life like a plaster image of an angel!"

Her father laughed, and Kathryn turned to Mrs. Lindsay.

"Mother, how ever did you have the courage to marry Father? I wouldn't marry a clergyman for the world!"

"Why, Kathryn! I'm sorry to hear that you

don't approve of clergymen, seeing that your knowledge of them is based solely upon your acquaintance with me. What have I done to give you such a poor opinion of clergymen?" His eyes twinkled.

"I've nothing against you, against clergymen themselves. You are a perfect old darling, a regular duck! And the dear old Bishop is a cherub, even if his legs are lumpy! But there's something I want to do, oh, so badly; and since I am a clergyman's daughter, I can't do it. It wouldn't be proper."

"What is it you want to do?" asked Mrs. Lindsay.

Kathryn spoke slowly. "I—want—to take—Iola Burtis—by—the—nose—and—twist—it—off—her—face! That's all."

"Kathryn!" expostulated her mother.

"What has Iola's nose done to offend you?" inquired Mr. Lindsay. "If I remember aright, Iola's nose is quite pretty,—quite worth looking at."

"That's just it! Her nose *is* pretty, so I'd like to twist it off. A girl like Iola doesn't deserve to have a pretty nose!"

Mrs. Lindsay was about to speak.

"Now, Mother, don't tell me that I am speaking in an unbecoming way—for a *clergyman's daughter*—"

ter! I know I have no right to have such unchristian-like feelings towards any one; but please don't tell me so! I know it already."

Mr. Lindsay drew her on his knee. "Come, tell us all about it!"

According to her custom when occupying her father's knee, she began to plait and unplait his beard in two thick, stubby braids.

"I suppose you have heard the story about Cecily and Toni's father?"

He nodded.

"Well, Iola Burtis got hold of it, through Mandy Fly, I believe, and she has made Toni's life at school simply unbearable, with her sneers and innuendoes. The mean little cat! It makes me boil over with rage. Toni is so brave, and she doesn't say a word. I want to do something really vicious! But since I am a *clergyman's daughter*, I must snivel and sing a psalm when I'm just crazy to—to—well, to cuss! I wish you were a butcher or a blacksmith for one day only! Iola Burtis would never have the chance of poking her nose into other people's business again. She wouldn't have a nose to poke with. She and Mandy Fly are the poky-nosiest people I know!"

student, a German, and had a wonderful voice. We—became engaged. Then Basil, your grandfather, sent for me. I came home at once; but I expected to return to—Franz. Or he intended to come over to America for me. But Priscilla had just met with the accident which made her a cripple; and 'Toinette had gone back to France. Then there was little Annette, your mother. I had to stay here; I was needed. So I wrote—to Franz and told him—it was a mistake—that he must not come for me.”

“ But you wanted him to come? ”

“ Oh, yes! But I couldn't leave little Annette and poor Priscilla.”

“ Didn't Franz—insist on coming for you? ”

“ Yes, at first. So I—had to let him think—I didn't care—that I had changed my mind. It was very hard—to do that. Then he sent me a cruel letter, and it seemed that something—died in me; my heart perhaps. Since then I have been like a ghost, a living ghost. After Priscilla settled down to a life of invalidism, she didn't—need me. Any one could have waited upon her. She was so clever, she read all the time; and I, well, I bored her. Annette never learned to love me. At first, as a child, she seemed afraid of me. I suppose I was sad—too sad for a child to understand. After a

time she didn't need me. My brother kept to himself. He was heart-broken over 'Toinette; and, I fear, I bored him, too. So all these years I have been alone—quite, quite alone. No one has needed me.”

Her voice was steady, almost lifeless in its tones. Indeed, she might have been a ghost speaking,—“a living ghost,” as she aptly described herself.

Cecily's tears fell on her aunt's hand.

“You'll never be able to say that again, Aunt Olivia!” she cried. “You'll never be alone! I love you—I need you! I do love you, Aunt Olivia!”

“That is the first time any one has said that to me for thirty years,—‘I love you.’”

“What became of Franz?” Cecily inquired.

“He became very famous—a wonderful tenor. That was his ambition,—a great Lohengrin, a great Parsifal.”

“Did he—marry?”

“I don't know. I suppose so.”

“Oh, wouldn't you like to see him again? Wouldn't it be lovely if you could meet, and have everything end beautifully after all!”

“No—that could—never be! But it would be wonderful to hear him sing—once more. I have

"all life's quintessence in an hour," as they re-lived the past in story and unspoken memories.

For several days after Mr. Hastings returned to Peacedale, he was irascible, parsimonious, and altogether unbearable.

"Grandfather must have been kind to some one in New York," Toni remarked to Cecily one day, as they were going home to their midday dinner.

"Kind to some one? Why?" questioned Cecily dubiously.

"Because he has been particularly hateful ever since he came back," replied Toni. "I have noticed that whenever he is pleasant or does a kind act, he seems to be ashamed of it, and tries to atone for the folly and weakness of being kind by being mean and detestable. It was disgraceful the way he treated Aunt Olivia this morning! I'm glad Aunt Priscilla has spunk enough to talk back."

Cecily laughed. "Didn't Delia look indignant when he ordered her to take the marmalade off the table?"

"Yes, I thought she was going to throw the jar at his head."

That afternoon Toni went to the kitchen to press some hair-ribbons. Before entering, she knocked, and disturbed Delia's impassioned warbling of "Love me and the wurr-urr-urld is mine."

“ May I come in and iron the creases out of my ribbons, Delia? ”

“ Sure! I guess them irons at the back of the stove are hot enough.”

Delia spread the ironing-blanket on the table and then went on with her singing as she kneaded a pan of bread.

“ How is it, Delia,” began Toni presently, “ that you sing love-songs and yet you hate men and wouldn’t marry? ”

“ Men! They’re only fit to sing about, not to live with. You see, it’s this way. I wouldn’t marry a man; no, not if he was an angel in disguise. But I sort of like to pretend that I have—well, a young man courting me. That I’m a Lady Cordelia and he’s a Dook of something or other; like in a story. It’s all right to have to do with a pretend man, for you can imagine him what he isn’t. But a real man!” Delia’s supreme scorn could not find words suitable for its utterance.

“ There never was a man outside a book that was fit to live with,” she continued. “ Of course, the Bible says that the Lord made man in His own image; and I don’t deny it. But that was a good time ago, and I guess the mold the Lord used was broken long ago, and men have been making themselves ever since; and a mighty poor job they’ve

appointed hour; but Lex did not appear. Tuesday he was still absent.

"Do you know what is the matter with Meredith?" Mr. Gifford asked Toni.

"No," she replied. "I haven't seen him since Friday. Perhaps Joe Barber had more hauling for Lex to do. He might have let it wait until the exams were over."

"He is not in sympathy with the lad's efforts," responded Mr. Gifford with a frown. "This is most unfortunate for Lex. He was going to make a brilliant showing for the Academy. Too bad, too bad!"

There was a half-holiday on Wednesday, and Toni started out immediately after dinner for the Barber farm.

"I feel that something is wrong with Lex, and I'm going to find out," she said to Cecily.

It was a walk of three miles over a lonely road which led through a forest of majestic pines. When she emerged from the gloom of the woods, she saw a dingy yellow house whose sagging foundation made it lean towards the road. She soon reached the front door, and found it covered with an old piece of rag carpet, which had been nailed across it. She picked her way to the rear of the house over drifts of snow, which had been

criss-crossed with the innumerable footprints of fowl.

In response to her knock, Mrs. Barber appeared and invited her to "jes' step inside."

Mrs. Barber was a tall, angular woman, with a hard face liberally sprinkled with freckles. Her sandy hair was drawn tightly back and twisted in a little knob on the top of her head. Her pale blue eyes blinked through white lashes. She wore a print Mother Hubbard, held in at the waist with a checked gingham apron.

"Oh, you mean Alexander!" she said in a high-pitched voice, when Toni inquired after Lex. "Why, he ain't been feelin' jes' right since Sunday. Cold kind-a settled in his lungs, I guess. And Mister wanted him for to do some more haulin' down to Twichell's mill; but he jes' couldn't stand on his legs on Monday. He'll be all right in a day or two, I guess. Boys is always hearty, and they soon git over any ailin'."

"May I see him?" asked Toni, as Mrs. Barber resumed her knitting.

"Why, yes! You kin jes' step up that stair-way. His room is right at the top. And when you come down you might jes' as well bring down the dinner-tray. And jes' tell him if he ain't had his dinner, I ain't goin' to traipse up with any

scholarship now, so my dream of going to college is over."

"Oh, Lex! I'm so sorry." She stroked his hand.

"I've worked hard, and I felt sure of passing. I knew that I had done my best, and couldn't fail. I have always believed that success or failure lay in our own hands; that with an ambitious will we could overcome all obstacles and shape our ends as we wished. Now I see that even in doing our best we are only able to 'rough hew.'" A violent fit of coughing ended his words.

"What have you had to eat to-day?" she asked with a look of disgust at the dinner.

"Some scorched oatmeal this morning," he replied. "I simply hadn't the courage to tackle that dinner, though I know that Mrs. Barber will be real mad when she knows I haven't eaten it."

"She won't know. We'll hide it. See! I'll wrap it up in one of these newspapers and take it out when I go home. When I reach the woods I'll throw it away."

Lex smiled feebly as he watched her.

"Here goes this vile decoction on the roof of the shed," she said, as she opened the window and poured the tea from the mug. Then she spread a

newspaper on the floor and carefully scraped the meat and vegetables off the plate.

"I'll leave the sea of gravy with the little icebergs of cold grease on the plate; otherwise my bundle will leak and betray me as I go out. Now bid farewell to the pie! If you had been rash enough to eat the dinner, this slab of pie might have served for your tombstone."

Another prolonged cough racked his frail body. She looked at him anxiously.

"I'm going down-stairs now to make love to Mrs. Barber and persuade her to let me boil an egg and warm some milk for you. O dear! you can't be warm enough in this cold room! That quilt is so thin and the blanket is cottony; it doesn't even pretend to be wool!"

She carried the tray down-stairs with great difficulty, and crashed against the door when she reached the bottom.

"Oh! he et his dinner, did he? He's so fine-mouthed these days that nothin' seems good enough for him."

Toni smiled. "Mrs. Barber, I don't want to bother you, but will you let me have some milk to warm for Lex? And I should like to boil an egg and make some toast. Just tell me where the things are. I'll get everything ready."

“ You don’t mean to say that after eating all that dinner he wants to put more vittles into his stomach!” Mrs. Barber’s knitting-needles ceased their clicking.

“ I—I thought, if you didn’t mind, I could get the things ready before I left, and then you wouldn’t have to bother about taking up his supper,” pleaded Toni.

“ Well, I guess it’s about time he come down for his meals. He’ll have to, or go empty. I don’t hold with boys laying in bed; and Mister wants him for to draw that timber over to Twichell’s to-morrow. So he might jes’ as well git up to-night.”

“ Just let me take up a bowl of warm milk; please, Mrs. Barber! Lex is really ill.”

“ An’ he’ll stay ill while there’s fools to wait on him. The milk’s in the separator, and I ain’t going to shake the cream, not for the President of the United States. You kin have an egg and some bread and butter, if you like.”

She brought the things from the pantry and laid them on the table.

Toni thanked her graciously, and proceeded to make some buttered toast. She broke a soft-boiled egg into a cup. Placing them on the tray, she carried them up-stairs and watched poor Lex struggle to eat.

"Oh, it is good of you, Toni!" He sank back exhausted on the hard pillow.

"Lex, you can't stay here—you simply can't!" she cried. "I'm going to rush home and find some way of getting you out of this!"

"Please, please don't, Toni!" he expostulated. "I'll be all right soon."

"You'll never be all right if you stay here. I'm going to Ma Trefethen. She'll know what to do. I'll take this tray down, and then I'll come back for that precious old dinner. But just make up your mind that we are going to get you out of here."

She was soon hurrying along the road, and when she passed beyond sight of the house she threw the despised dinner away. Presently she heard the sound of sleigh-bells behind her, and she waited by the roadside until the driver overtook her. He stopped at her signal.

"Will you let me drive with you to the town, please?" she asked.

"Waal, ef yuh don't mind the smell o' them pigs behind, yuh kin set up here with me," he answered; and he pulled aside a mangy buffalo-robe as she eagerly climbed up to the seat.

"Be yuh in a hurry?" he inquired.

"Yes; I'd like to get to Jim Trefethen's as quickly as possible."

“Waal, ef yuh be a friend o’ Jim’s, I’ll make this hoss git yuh thar as quick as winkin’.”

They skimmed over the snow and soon passed her grandfather’s place.

“It would be a waste of time for me to ask Grandfather to help,” she thought. “He’s in such a hateful mood. I’ll go straight to Jim and Ma.”

When they reached Jim’s lane, she jumped down and turned to thank her unknown driver.

“Waal, ef yuh be a friend o’ Jim’s, I don’t need no thanks. I’m real glad to help a friend o’ Jim’s.”

She rushed into the house and told her story. Jim had just come home and was beginning to remove his high boots.

“Well, I’m jiggered!” he exclaimed; and he hurriedly pulled up the boot he had partly taken off. “I’ll go after him at once.”

When Jim drove from the barn with Polly Feemus hitched to the old pung, which was filled with soft, sweet hay, Ma had blankets and pillows ready.

“Take these hot stones with you, Jim; and warm them in Barber’s stove again while you are getting Alexander ready. They will help to keep the boy warm when you’re driving him in. It will be cold and dark then. And here’s a bottle of hot cordial. It’ll keep warm till you get there; and see that

Alexander has a good dose of it. I'll have the front bedroom warmed and a hot bath ready. Be as quick as you can. Toni, you'd better go along, and you can sit in the back of the pung with Alexander and see that he keeps covered properly."

"Ma thinks of everything," said Jim to Toni as they drove along. "And Alexander'll get a taste of heaven when he has Ma looking after him. Suffering Cæsar! I'll be glad to get that boy away from Barber's! Ma and I wanted him to come and stay with us two years ago. I could have found some work for him to do, so he could have earned his keep and gone to the Academy regularly. But he kind of felt himself bound to the Barbers. He said they took him when he was ten, and not much use, as he thought; and he promised them he'd stay and work for them until he was seventeen. He's been nothing but a slave since then; and I guess he's earned his freedom by this time. The Lord will surely be willing to cancel the debt of that promise without any further payments. I tell you, Toni, there's lots of martyrs in the world that don't go round wearing a halo, and never get their pictures in a Book of Saints!"

CHAPTER XIX

LEX'S VICTORY, BLANK VERSE, AND THE MACBETHS

WHEN Jim and Toni reached the Barber farm, Joe Barber had just returned from cutting trees in the pine woods. He was in a churlish mood because the timber-hauling to the mill had been delayed by Lex's illness. At first he objected to Jim's taking the sick boy away.

"It's no use being mean, Joe. The boy's ill—you can't deny that. If he stays here, as you say, there'll be a big doctor-bill for you to pay, because you'll have to send for Dr. Winthrop. Every one in Peacedale knows how well Alexander has worked for you; and you'll find yourself in a pretty fix if you don't give him proper care now that he is laid up. He may die on your hands, you know."

Jim's argument prevailed and very soon they started back to Peacedale. Lex, rolled up in warm blankets, and with hot stones at his feet, lay on the hay in the pung, and Toni sat beside him to shield him from the wind. The sky was a dark, misty

blue, and the forest of pines was silhouetted against the horizon like a huge blot of black ink.

She laid her hand on Lex's forehead. It was feverishly hot, and the boy began to mutter drowsily as they entered the woods, where the wind moaned and murmured among the pines. She was obliged to leave them at her grandfather's gate, as she knew her people would be anxious over her prolonged absence.

"It isn't far now," said Jim. "And I'll have Dr. Winthrop in right away. Alexander'll be safe when he's in Ma's care. We've done a good day's work, Toni; and I'm jiggered if Alexander ever goes back to Barber's again!"

She told her story at the supper-table. Grandfather suddenly dropped his acerbity and became very gentle as he questioned her. He showed such a friendly interest and concern about Lex that Toni fell in love with him.

"Olivia, see that the boy has broths and jellies," said Grandfather, not unkindly.

The next morning on her way to school, Toni learned that Lex was seriously ill with pneumonia. Poor old Rachel Lee was doing the housework at Jim's cottage, while Ma gave all her attention to the sick boy, who required constant watching.

"Jim, Aunt Olivia wished me to tell you that

she's coming over this afternoon to relieve Ma. You know she's had experience in nursing Aunt Priscilla, and she is very fond of Lex."

"Well, Toni, that's mighty kind of Miss Hastings; and I guess Ma'll be glad of a little sleep. I can remember your Aunt Olivia when she was a pretty young thing,—tall and slender as a sapling. Her hair and eyes were black as night, and her cheeks and lips made all the red roses look sick. Indeed, those long-legged roses you pay fifty cents apiece for in Portland—American Beauties, they're called—remind me of Miss Olivia when she was young. For she was an American Beauty in those days. Then her hair suddenly became gray, and her eyes lost their sparkle, and her cheeks paled, so that she seemed to wither all at once, as if a blight had struck her. That whole house has seemed blighted, as if some curse had come upon it. I shouldn't wonder if you young folks could lift the curse. Tell Miss Olivia that Ma'll be real glad to have her come."

Aunt Olivia's services were not needed, though she went over to Jim's with wine and jellies for the patient. Grandfather had not been idle. During the morning he saw Dr. Winthrop and voluntarily assumed all the expenses of Lex's illness.

"Telegraph for a nurse from Portland, Win-

throp; two, if necessary. Don't let Mrs. Trefethen wear herself out. She's willing and capable, I know. See that the boy has all he needs. I'll stand for the expense, so give him every possible chance."

The nurse caught the noon train for Peacedale, and by that time the whole town knew that Lex's life was in danger. For two weeks sleigh-bells were muffled in Peacedale, and Jim was beset with inquiries from all sides.

Then came a dreadful day, when a great specialist arrived from Boston. For thirty-six hours he, aided by Dr. Winthrop and two nurses, fought for Lex's life—and won! When the struggle was over and Lex lay sleeping under the charge of one of the nurses, the two doctors, shirtsleeved and unshaven, sat in Ma's dining-room and ate the midnight supper she had prepared for them.

"The lad has no stamina, Winthrop," the great specialist said, as he passed his glass to Ma for more cider. "He has not been properly nourished; but his will-power is miraculous. His determination to live has practically pulled him through."

He turned to Ma. "Beyond knowing that he is not your son, Mrs. Trefethen, I know nothing of my patient. Where does he come from?"

"His father taught in the high school in my home town," began Ma. "He was a clever man, but sad

and quiet. Lex's mother was one of the scholars there, and they were married when she was quite young,—much younger than the teacher. He died about two years later, and left her with the child, one year old. Then she taught in a little district school until she wore herself out and died when the boy was ten. There were no relatives to care for Lex, and the Barbers took him on condition that he would work on their farm until he was seventeen. He is sixteen now, and has had a hard life—hard work, bad food, disappointment. It's a wonder he has the courage to live."

"Lex, h'm. What is his name?"

"Alexander Meredith."

"*What?*" The specialist's glass came down on the table with a force that cracked it. "Alexander Meredith, did you say?"

"Yes." Ma looked surprised at the man's vehemence.

"This is miraculous! Alexander Meredith! There can't be any doubt! I wonder if his father was Alexander Meredith at Harvard years ago."

"I can get some books belonging to Alexander's father, and some old pictures." Ma left the room and soon returned with several books and old photographs.

Dr. Drummond seized them eagerly. He recognized the photographs at once.

"Winthrop, this is wonderful! Alexander Meredith and I were pals at Harvard. During his third year his father committed suicide. It was a terrible affair. His mother died suddenly, owing to the shock, and my friend simply disappeared. He felt the disgrace keenly. He was a sensitive chap, dreamy and idealistic; and his father's dishonor broke his heart. He drifted away from us all, and no one knew what had become of him. Poor old Lex Meredith! And here is a little book I gave him years ago."

He remained silent for a few moments. Then he rose and walked up and down the room.

"Mrs. Trefethen, tell your husband he needn't drive me to the early train. I'm going to wait until Lex wakes up. Thank God we were able to save him! Lex's boy! He's going to be my boy now."

"There, Ma Trefethen!" said Dr. Winthrop with a smile. "You see Lex's troubles are all over."

"Yes," added Dr. Drummond. "I'm a lonely old bachelor, and Lex is going to be my son. Harvard will have another Lex Meredith."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" was Jim's verdict when he heard the news.

Lex did not learn of his changed fortunes for several days. Dr. Drummond came back from Boston and told him when they were alone in the little front room. The boy could not speak; but he held out his poor, thin hands, which were quickly and gently clasped by the doctor's strong ones.

"I'll try to be worthy, sir," he said huskily; and two tears slowly coursed down his pale, hollow cheeks.

There was a suspicious glitter in the man's kind eyes, but he only said: "Tut-tut, my boy! Get well."

And Lex got well.

March came to Peacedale like a roaring lion, and, after a week of blustering and raging, suddenly pretended to be a lamb. The trees dripped for days with melting snow. The roads and sidewalks were wet and slushy. Often from the roofs a weight of snow descended with a rolling rumble and a soft thud.

"But we ain't got rid of winter yet," said Ezekiel Martin, when making his daily promenade along the main street.

"Certainly Zeke Martin does lend rank and tone to Peacedale with his constable's uniform and swinging stick," observed Jim. "He's worth the sixty dollars that Peacedale pays him every Jan-

uary, even if he doesn't have to arrest folks. He makes the place look prosperous and important; and he's the best weather-prophet we have."

It was in March that the Peacedale Literary Society held a meeting in Jim's dining-room and discussed "Macbeth." This society had been formed by Jim shortly before Christmas, and was composed of the older members of the Peacedale community.

"The young folks at the Academy are studying Shakespeare's 'Macbeth' in the English literature class," said Jim one night at Ben Sawyer's store, where the Peacedale Political Club was holding an informal session around the stove. "Now, why can't we old folks form a society of high-noses—no, high-brows, is the term—and do likewise. We're letting the girls and boys get ahead of us intellectually. Let's start in and keep up with them."

"'Macbeth?' Never heard tell of it. Who wrote it?" asked Ben Sawyer.

Jim explained what he knew of the play, and succeeded in arousing their interest. As a result the men and their wives met once a week during the winter, to hear Jim read "Macbeth" aloud. The women occupied themselves with knitting, and the men smoked. The final meeting was a social affair, for, after discussing the play, they were to have a supper.

"What kind o' readin' is this, anyway?" asked Obadiah Brimson.

"It ain't like ordinary printing; and it ain't poetry, for the words don't sound alike. I always know poetry when I hear it," said Ezekiel Martin; and he quoted:

"Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are;
Up above the world so high
Like a diamond in the sky."

"There you have it! Star—are; high—sky. That's poetry. Now 'Macbeth' ain't like that," Ezekiel finished, with an air of importance.

"No, the lines don't rhyme," agreed Ben Sawyer, "though it's printed like it was verse, with a capital letter beginning each line."

"It's a kind of poetry called blank verse," Jim remarked.

"Oh! I suppose it's called that because there's a blank space on each side of the printin'. It doesn't stretch all across the page, like other readin'," observed Ben Sawyer.

"Well, then, it ain't no credit to Shakespeare, this writin' blank verse," declared Mrs. Sawyer. "It's up to the printer. It's all in the way it's printed. I could write blank verse myself, if the printer knew his business."

"I guess we all could," sniffed "Sophiar" Brimson.

"Well, what do you think of these Macbeths, anyway?" Porky Thompson addressed them all.

"I think Mrs. Macbeth might 'a' been own cousin to Mandy Fly," proclaimed Sophiar.

"Well, now, I rather like Mrs. Macbeth," ventured her husband, Obadiah.

"You'd say that, Obe, if only to spite me!" snapped Sophiar.

"To my mind Mrs. Macbeth was to blame for the whole business," declared Porky Thompson.

"No, sir!" exclaimed Ezekiel, who was wearing his uniform. "Now I speak in my offeeshul capacity, as constable of this town, seeing as how I'm supposed to have some knowledge o' criminals; not that I'm saying that there's criminals in Peacedale! But it is my opinion, speaking as a constable and wearing my uniform as I do, that Mr. Macbeth was the one I'd have arrested if I'd been in Scotland at the time. And I'd have run in them witches for disturbing of the peace."

"Yes, Mr. Macbeth was the one that ought to be blamed," said Ben Sawyer, refilling his pipe.

"That was a dirty trick he played the old king that was visiting him,—killing the old guy in his bed!" Obadiah Brimson clenched his fists.

"Well, she egged him on. He wouldn't 'a' done it if she hadn't given him a boost when he was weakening!" Sophiar declared emphatically, and she glared at Obadiah.

"That's it! He wanted it done, but he was a coward. The wanting to do it is as bad as doing; and he hadn't the spunk she had," said Mrs. Sawyer, who became excited and dropped a needleful of stitches.

"Then, by thunder! why didn't she kill the old king herself?" cried Porky Thompson.

"Because the king looked like her own father," said Jim. "And, anyway, it was a man's job. Macbeth was a soldier, and he was used to killing folks."

"Yes, that's it! That's so!" added Obadiah. "It was up to him to kill the old guy, so that he could toddle about with a crown on his head and a spectre in his fist."

"What's a spectre?" asked Mrs. Porky.

"Obe means a 'sceptre,'" explained Jim. "It's a big stick a king holds,—something like the club Zeke carries."

"Well, now, I do say that if Mrs. Macbeth had let her husband alone he wouldn't 'a' done it, and they could have settled down quietly and reared a respectable family; then there needn't 'a' been all

those murders and things." Mrs. Porky began to turn the heel of a stocking she was knitting.

"All I says is,"—Sophiar Brimson's tone implied that when she had finished there would be nothing more to be said on the subject,—“that Mrs. Macbeth put the idea in her husband's head. He wouldn't 'a' thought of killing the king if she hadn't told him to do it.”

“Now there you're mistaken,” broke in Jim. “The witches started it; and he wrote and told his wife about it. He thought of killing Duncan as soon as the witches said he was to be king, so it isn't fair to put the blame on her.”

“That's it! He put the idea into her head, and she had the nerve to make him carry it out. He started the trouble, and he's to blame,” shouted Obadiah.

“The witches began it.” Ezekiel's fist came down on the table. “I don't believe in witches anyway, nor fortune-tellers. They're all a bad lot.”

“Well, I thank my stars the Macbeths ain't livin' in Peacedale!” exclaimed Sophiar. “They ain't the sort o' folks I'd want for neighbors. I wouldn't want to borrow an egg from the likes of her!”

“And with all their banqueting and drinking,

they'd be no credit to the State o' Maine," added Mrs. Porky.

"Say, I'd like to see Mrs. Macbeth and Mandy Fly having a scrap," observed Obadiah with a chuckle.

"We haven't settled yet who's to blame," said Mrs. Sawyer.

"Suppose we let Zeke decide," suggested Ma.

"Yes, Zeke's the one. He represents the government," said Jim.

Ezekiel scratched his head. "Well, as I said before, speaking in my offeeshul capacity and in my uniform, I think and firmly believe that them witches should get the blame; and I'd suggest that the Macbeths bind themselves to keep the peace."

"I'd like to have the hanging of the witches, if only for that mess they made in their kettle," said Ben Sawyer. "Last week I had a meal at a restaurant in Portland. I ordered hash, and if it wasn't made from the same 'receep' that the witches used for their stew, I'll eat my overshoes."

Ma rose. "Now that the business of the evening has been settled, we'll have our little banquet; and I assure you that there will be no witches' stew served."

"Well, Ma Trefethen," said Ezekiel, "I wouldn't hesitate to eat witches' stew if you made it, for I

never tasted a meal in your house that wasn't the best yet. And it's my opinion, speaking offeeshully and unoffeeshully, that if there'd been as many charming ladies who were good cooks in Scotland in those days as there are now in Peacedale, Shakespeare would have had a different story to tell. For there'd have been no murders, no witches, and no trouble whatever. But, just the same, he told the story blame well; and I'm sorry he's not alive now, to write a play in blank verse about the ladies of Peacedale!" Ezekiel bowed as gallantly as his orb-like proportions would admit.

"Here's to Shakespeare!" cried Jim, standing up when their mugs had been filled with cider. "He's given us pleasant evenings together, with his story. And we must admit that he did mighty well with the stuff he had to write about in those days. By gum! think what he could do if he lived in the world now! To Shakespeare!"

"And down with the witches!" added Ezekiel.

CHAPTER XX

A WITHERED ROMANCE

THE wind was sweeping boisterously over the coast, driving loose gray clouds across a sullen sky, and lashing the waves into a wild fury. April was on the way, and the lion, March, was angry.

Already the sap was rising in the trees, and the pussy-willows were getting ready to cast aside the tight brown-satin hoods they had worn all winter. The waters of Silver Brook gushed and gurgled beneath their icy fetters: "Free, free! we shall soon be free!"

A robin, the little John the Baptist of the spring, hopped about on the Hastings lawn, and looked very wise as he chirped his announcement of Spring's coming. When Ezekiel Martin saw two crows flying over Chandler's meadow, all Peacedale knew that winter was hastening to the world of frozen waters in the north.

Cecily was shivering on her way home from school. She had left Toni with Lex, who was still invalided at Jim's cottage, though he was now in the final stage of convalescence.

“Ugh!” she shuddered as she let the gate swing behind her with a bang. “This wind is strong enough to tear one to pieces.”

She ran up the driveway, and as she drew near the house, the front door opened and she saw Aunt Olivia standing just inside.

“Cecily, Cecily dear!” Aunt Olivia’s voice quivered with suppressed excitement. “Come into my room.”

There was a vivid flush in her cheeks, and her eyes held an unaccustomed sparkle. Cecily followed her aunt into the large bedroom, where an open newspaper had been tossed on the bed.

“He is here! He is to sing in Portland to-morrow!” cried Aunt Olivia, and she pointed to a paragraph near the top of the paper.

Cecily read:

“Herr Franz von Geyer, the celebrated German tenor, who achieved an international reputation by his wonderful performances of Lohengrin and Parsifal, will give a recital at Selmar Hall on Friday evening. Herr von Geyer’s voice is phenomenal, for, despite his lengthy and brilliant career, it still retains the limpid freshness of youth. At a recent recital in New York, at Carnegie Hall, his singing met with a furor of applause; and, in order to gratify the demands of the thousands who were unable to secure seats, he will give another recital there

next week, before sailing for Europe. Portland is therefore to be congratulated on having an opportunity of hearing this rare artist, who will probably not visit America again."

"Oh, Aunt Olivia!" cried Cecily, embracing her aunt. "You—we must go over to-morrow and hear him. Your longing will be gratified at last!"

"It seems so strange," mused Aunt Olivia. "I shall go to hear him—after many years. To think that he still sings! He has not grown old, as I have."

"Well, singers always take such wonderful care of themselves," laughed Cecily. "They keep their digestions in perfect order, and never get their weet fet—I mean feet wet. And so they don't grow old; they simply spread out and get fat. Besides, I should think that a tenor voice would help to keep a man young."

The next day Cecily and her aunt took a late afternoon train to Portland. They drove to the Treble House and engaged a room, as there was no train leaving at a convenient time that night for Peacedale.

After the evening dinner they dressed for the concert. Their room was large, with massive furniture. On one side a door led into their private bathroom. On the opposite side a bureau was

placed before another door, which connected with the next room.

Aunt Olivia wore a gray silk dress, with a foam of creamy lace at the throat and wrists. Just before dinner Cecily had gone out to a florist's up the street, and bought some deep crimson roses, which she now fastened on her aunt's dress.

"I'm going to arrange your hair, Aunt Olivia," she said. "Those braids wound coronet-fashion about your head are lovely, but we must loosen the hair over your forehead. So! Now, that softens the outline. Why do you always have your hair drawn back so tightly? It waves so prettily on your forehead. I'm very proud of you!" She kissed her aunt, who gazed at her reflection in the mirror with an air of bewilderment.

"Oh, Cecily! I feel so strange! It is like drifting back into the past—through a mist of dreams."

When they reached Selmar Hall they found the lobby crowded, and the only seats Cecily could secure were in a box. An usher conducted them to the box. They found one seat already occupied by a plump, moon-faced woman, whose blond hair had escaped in sundry places from diamond-studded tortoise-shell pins and stuck out like bits of yellow wire. She wore a black net dress, all aglitter with

sequins, and her fat, pudgy hands were bedecked with sparkling rings.

With a friendly smile she pushed her chair aside and made room for Cecily, also indicating that there was still space enough for Aunt Olivia's chair in the front.

"Thank you; my aunt prefers to sit behind us," said Cecily.

"Ach so!" the stranger nodded. "I always sit near die stage, ven mein husband sings. It pleases me to see die people, die audience rejoice and make die applause ven mein husband sings. He is so great, so *wunderschön*!"

Cecily glanced back at her aunt. Yes, she had heard! She sat in the shadow of the box, with her slender, gloved hands clasped in her lap, and a little shower of crimson petals fell, one by one, from the roses pinned on her breast.

"Aunt Olivia's heart's blood," thought Cecily.

The garrulous frau continued: "It is dat mein husband comes no more to America, and it pleases me much. I have in my heart no love for dis country; but I travel always mit mein husband. In die opera, ven I vas young, I sing in die chorus. I marry him den. A man is so like a child; and a singer more a child still. So he needs me always, always!"

She fanned herself vigorously with a huge fan, in the centre of which was painted a scene from Lohengrin, showing the Swan Knight floating down the Scheldt.

“New York is die only place I have gladly in dis country. But dis ceety, dis Portland, you call it? is so cold, so drear! Mein husband vill sing here; he insists, and we come. As I say always—a singer is a great child.”

The accompanist, a small, dark man, walked over towards the piano with an expression of gloomy resignation. If the Steinway, with its raised lid and gleaming keys, had been a monster dragon with wide-open jaws waiting to devour him, he could not have looked more doleful as he slunk across the platform.

After a preamble of scales, trills, and dainty staccato chords, he paused for a moment and a hush fell over the audience. Then he crashed into the opening chords of Liszt’s “Sixth Rhapsody.” He played well, but every one was eager to hear the tenor, so he was given but perfunctory applause when he had finished.

Programs rustled, conversation buzzed. Then a tense silence of a second broke out into spontaneous applause, as a bulky, black-suited form, with a shining acre of white shirt-front, emerged from

the palms which surrounded the door leading onto the stage. Cecily held her breath. So this was Franz von Geyer! This huge man, who, with his bulging figure and bristling mop of blond hair, resembled a gigantic stein overflowing with foaming lager.

“Ach! he is so *wunderschön!*” sighed the frowsy frau. “He vill ever wear a red rose ven he sings.”

It was a varied and interesting program, and the tenor sang delightfully. The audience applauded each number with wild enthusiasm, but the singer responded only with awkward bows and broad smiles.

“Ach! he sings like an angel!” murmured the blissfully adoring wife.

Cecily did not look back at Aunt Olivia. “I am so glad we are in this box, where Aunt Olivia can sit by herself in that dark corner,” she thought. “But the wonderful Franz is so unromantic to look at, though his wife is right—he sings like an angel.”

She closed her eyes to listen, and to create an illusion that it *was* an angel singing, and not a man who made her think of suet, lard, and sausages.

After the third group of songs the tenor unexpectedly walked to the footlights; and the accompanist sneaked over to the piano, like a small terrier whose master had just beaten him.

The great tenor sang the very song that had won Aunt Olivia's heart years before.

Cecily turned. Aunt Olivia had risen and was fastening the clasps of her long fur coat with nervous haste.

There was a burst of applause, but the tenor did not appear. The pianist came forward and began Chopin's "Ballade in G-minor," and the audience grew still. Frau von Geyer rose from her seat.

"Is it dat you are ill?" She addressed Aunt Olivia, and held out a jeweled vinaigrette.

"No, I thank you." Aunt Olivia looked down at the friendly, perturbed face with a sad smile.

"You go? You not stay? Ach! you miss so much!" There was anxious regret in the whispered words.

Aunt Olivia shook her head.

"Ach! I have on *die rosen* put my feet!" the frau exclaimed, as she noticed the rose-petals on the floor where she was standing.

"They are only the petals," replied Aunt Olivia, and the same wistful smile flitted across her face. She held out her hand. "It is—necessary for—us to leave—now. You must be—very proud—to hear your husband sing so beautifully."

"You miss so much—so much!" The frau re-

sumed her seat, and Cecily and her aunt stole from the box as the audience applauded the "Ballade."

When they reached their room at the hotel, Aunt Olivia seemed dazed, and allowed Cecily to remove her wraps. The roses on her breast had shed all their petals. She unfastened them and laid them gently on the bureau.

Cecily did not speak. She hung up their things, and, after removing her dress, began to brush her soft brown hair.

"Cecily, he—looked like this in the old days—long ago."

Cecily tossed her hair back from her face, and saw her aunt holding out a photograph in a soft leather frame. She took it in her hand. It was a handsome youth she gazed at; tall and slender, with a military bearing which gave him the air of a young prince. Except for his bushy hair, the photograph bore no resemblance to the famous tenor.

"Oh, Aunt Olivia!" Cecily could say no more, and she gave the picture back.

It was Aunt Olivia's custom to play solitaire for half an hour before retiring; and when Cecily, in nightgown and dainty blue robe, with cheeks glowing from a hot bath, returned to the room, she found her aunt seated at the table with the cards arranged before her.

She looked up. "Do you want to sleep right away, Cecily? Will the light disturb you?"

Cecily leaned over and kissed her. "No, Aunt Olivia. I feel like reading, and I'll finish a magazine story I began before dinner."

She arranged her pillows in a pile, and sat in bed with her knees drawn up, supporting the magazine.

Presently a murmuring sound came through the closed door, and a man's voice, speaking in fretful tones, was distinctly heard, while a woman answered with a patient, placating tenderness. They spoke in German, which Aunt Olivia and Cecily understood. The girl involuntarily looked at her aunt. The cards fell from the nervous fingers; some clicked upon the bare table and others dropped noiselessly to the floor. The occupants of the next room were undoubtedly Franz von Geyer and his adoring wife.

Suddenly the man hurled a storm of abuse, vindictive and passionate, at his wife, who remained quite unruffled, and answered with a placidity which seemed to irritate the angry man. He could be heard pacing up and down, and his violence increased every moment.

"You must not drive me into scenes like this," he roared. "My voice, it is precious! My temperament must be considered; and you tell me, you

dare to tell me, that there is no sherry for me to take with my egg. I need it! I must have it! You must get it! My voice, my voice!”

“But I have explained that the flask was broken,” her smooth voice gently protested; “that all the sherry leaked out. And here it is impossible to procure some more sherry—in this city—in this State. It is not my fault. I have done my best. You must not allow yourself to become so distraught. You must save your wonderful voice.”

“*Ach!* that is it,” he stormed. “I must save my voice, and you—you—and every one—you do your best to destroy it. *Mein Gott!* save my voice! And no sherry with my egg. It is an outrage—an egg without sherry!”

“*Lieber Franz,* let me brush your beautiful hair and soothe you! So, sit down; and just for once take your egg without sherry.”

“*Ach!*” he almost screamed. “My egg! No sherry! My voice, my precious voice!”

“Come, come, you will feel better when I brush your hair. There, there, your wonderful hair—your crown of gold! Is it not better so?”

The big man wept. “*Ach* my wonderful hair! My wonderful voice! No sherry! N-n-n-no sh-sh-sh-sherry!”

Cecily kept her eyes on her magazine, but she

could not distinguish the words. She dared not look at her aunt. What *would* Aunt Olivia think? It was tragic and—funny, too. She wanted to laugh; she wanted to cry. What a pity this had happened to spoil Aunt Olivia's beautiful romantic memory of the evening! It had converted the romance into a farce. She summoned up courage and looked over towards the table.

Aunt Olivia sat there—*laughing!*

For one wild, anxious moment Cecily thought her aunt had suddenly become insane. She leaped out of bed and ran across the room.

"Aunt Olivia!"

"Cecily dear, don't look like that," she said, taking the trembling girl in her arms.

Cecily gazed wonderingly down at her aunt's face. "I'm so sorry this has happened, Aunt Olivia. It is such a pity!"

"My dear child, I am glad it has happened. It is just what I needed."

Cecily drew back in surprise. Aunt Olivia *must* be mad!

"Years ago, Cecily, my life was blighted by a frost; and I have been withered and weak ever since. It was all very sad and tragic; and I suffered terribly, terribly! Now, when a plant is injured by the frost, what does the gardener do? He

cuts it back to the very root. He doesn't let it struggle along, with its blighted leaves and blossoms. Then what happens? The plant puts forth new shoots, and lives again, strong and sturdy. To-night I have had my pruning and cutting. I am going to throw away the withered leaves and flowers of my romance. I am going to grow again! It has hurt me, but I know I needed it."

"Why, Aunt Olivia!" exclaimed Cecily. "You are wonderful! I thought this would break your heart, but you look like some one who has stepped out of the mists into sunlight."

Aunt Olivia gathered up the cards. She packed them together and placed them in the leather case. She removed her hairpins, and two long silver braids fell over her rose-colored dressing-gown. She began to brush the soft waves of hair, and presently paused to listen, with the brush raised in her hand.

Franz von Geyer sang for a moment in an undertone. A little phrase of Schubert's "Serenade" drifted in from the other room and sank into silence.

Aunt Olivia shook her head and glanced at Cecily with a little twisted smile, half-tender, half-wistful.

"I don't think I shall ever care for that song again," she said; "or red roses, either."

CHAPTER XXI

THE STARRIEST WAY

DEAR OLD DADDY:

“ Oh, wonderful, wonderful! Most wonderful, wonderful! And yet again wonderful! And after that ”—well, I will share the magic secret with you! Spring is here!

Two days ago it was cold; shivery, wet, clammy cold. It seemed as if all the cold weather of the winter had been wrapped up in mist and given to this one day. The naked trees in the orchard, with their boughs all turned inland, looked as if a host of Daphnes, pursued by the wind, had taken root as apple-trees instead of laurels.

That night a strange, unseen visitant came and left behind her a warm, moist day. The earth was given a Turkish bath. It was baked and steamed. A lovely, wet, earthy smell was in the air; and a breeze, like baby sighs, kissed all the hard leaf-buds on the bare trees.

This morning a sunbeam slanted through the window, across my bedroom floor, and crawled up the opposite wall. When I looked out, I saw bare lawns, brown, bleak fields, and skeleton-boughed trees all draped in a faint shimmer of green,—a gauzy veil of Spring's weaving.

“Spring is here!” laughed the ocean; and the sun wrote the phrase all over the sky,—words of sunlight on a parchment of blue.

Oh, Daddy dear! if I could only sit on your knee again, and pull your ears, and tell you what a really dear person you are, and how much I love you! I want you, want you so much!

I wish you could see Cecily now. She is getting prettier every day. She is just as sweet and dainty as a bunch of apple-blossoms. She and Aunt Olivia are great friends.

Aunt Olivia is wonderfully changed. She always seemed to me like a mummy, wrapped up in innumerable swathings for years and years. One could see just a vague, shapeless something, and could only form hazy conjectures as to what was hidden under those wrappings of silence and cold reserve. Now she has thrown aside those wrappings and come forth a princess. Of course, she is not a youthful princess, but there is a charm about her that suggests youth; like the perfume of the spices and essences that were laid in her mummy-casings. Spring has come to Aunt Olivia’s heart.

Basil is working with his music. He and Aunt Priscilla read in the afternoons, after they have strolled together on the south veranda. Her conversation is not nearly so *humphy* as it used to be. She and Basil are great chums. He looks much stronger. This climate agrees with him; and Aunt Priscilla’s bracing ways have done him good.

So, you see, Cecily has Aunt Olivia, and Basil has Aunt Priscilla; but Toni, your poor little Toni, has no one. In desperation I might seize on Grand-

father; but he has been like a "fretful porpentine" lately, bristling with sarcasm and ill-humor.

Lex has gone to Boston. He spent ten days with us, and then Dr. Drummond came and took him away. I miss him dreadfully. Dear old Lex! Life is full of priceless possibilities for him now.

So I have no chummy friend left. That is why I can't get over the ache of wanting you. We were such jolly old comrades, weren't we? Of course, I have my good times, but nothing seems quite right without you. My pleasures are crumpled and wrinkled, as if they had been bought at Life's bargain-counter of ready-made joys—greatly reduced.

All my joys are misfits without you.

TONI.

Mr. Hastings sat in his study, reading. The windows were opened wide, and through the fluttering curtains came glimpses of the garden, with a huge bed of crocuses looking like dabs of paint splashed on an artist's palette. The trees were almost in full leaf, and millions of flower-buds were bursting with eagerness to unfold their petals. Three old apple-trees, twisted and bent, had been allowed to remain in the garden, like old pensioners, though their fruit had been withered and worm-eaten for years. Their spreading boughs were leafy, and their buds were like pink pearls set in green. Another warm day would turn these old trees into immense bridal bouquets.

Toni knocked at the study-door. "I have brought the mail, Grandfather," she called.

He looked up. "Come in."

She gave him his letters. In her left arm she held a sheaf of daffodils.

"Aren't these flowers wonderful, Grandfather? They look like blossoming sunlight, don't they? I am going to give them to you. They will look lovely in that ugly, valuable, Chinese bowl."

"Be careful! That jar could not be replaced."

While he read his letters she brought water for the bowl, and arranged the blossoms and spear-like leaves with a careless, natural grace that gave them the appearance of growing in the dim corner.

"There!" flicking the drops from her fingers. "Aren't they wonderful? Oh, Grandfather, doesn't a day like this make you tingle with joy? Don't you feel that the world has been freshly made over, just for you?"

He smiled. "Is that how you feel?"

"Yes. For some unexplained reason my heart is filled with dizzy-fizzying stuff called joy. The sun has polished everything up; the air is a-tingle with triumph; the breeze is dancing tiptoe; and I must keep in step with the world. Somehow, I feel that something good is coming to me. I can't help

being happy in such a beautiful, shiny-bright world!"

"Ah, well, you are a child. Hold on to your rainbows of faith as long as you can. Soon you will become old and wise, and you will see that the rainbows are rags, torn and dusty."

Toni sighed. "Ah, Grandfather, I am not old or wise, but sometimes when I am sad I drag my rainbows through the dust and they are sadly torn and tangled. On a day like this I must fly my rainbows like kites, and they must go far, far up towards the sky!"

"Sit down, Toni."

She curled up in one of the big chairs. "I should like to remain with you for a little while, Grandfather. Cecily has gone off with Aunt Olivia along the shore. Basil is reading aloud to Aunt Priscilla some very dull, tiresome book on theosophy. I'm terribly lonesome these days!" She leaned her chin on her hand and looked at him wistfully.

"You miss Lex, I suppose."

Her face brightened. "Miss Lex? Indeed I do!"

"How are you getting along at the Academy?"

"Very well. Mr. Gifford says I am improving in algebra. It's time I did."

"I was not referring to lessons. How are you getting along with your fellow-pupils?"

She pursed her lips. "Well, it isn't as bad as it used to be. For a while it was terrible. You see, Grandfather, every one knows about—Dad; and for a time it was very hard for Cecily and me. It—it was dreadful. Some of the girls were—very cruel; but we faced it out, and they are pleasanter now. It is some time since I have had newspaper clippings about prisons and convicts slipped into my desk. The other day we were studying 'The Prisoner of Chillon'; and I know every one thought of Dad, and rather pitied or despised us because of him. It hurts, Grandfather. It hurts!" her lips quivered.

"I think if I could see Dad just once it would give me courage. I want to see him so badly that the longing is like a bruise inside. Dad and I were such great pals."

"You love your father, Toni?"

"Love my father?" she echoed with a deep sigh. "Why, Grandfather, he's—he's—well, he's Dad!" Her face shone with a glow of love as she uttered the words.

"Did you love your mother as much?"

"Oh, yes! I loved my mother. She was so young and pretty. She devoted herself to Basil.

He was delicate, and she seemed always to be trying to make up to him for all that he must miss in life on account of his infirmity. I was such a rollicking, healthy little person, I didn't need her as much. And when she—died—I somehow helped Dad, and belonged specially to him. I never dreamed of being separated from Dad. That is why I feel so lonely now. It is dreadful to be lonely!"

"The others—Cecily and Basil—they don't feel the same?" he said after a pause.

Toni half smiled. "They are different. Cecily is the sort of girl who can be happy anywhere, for people always love her. She will probably marry young and drift away to a life of her own. Then Basil has his music, and he also can be happy anywhere—with a good piano. So he does not depend upon any one—for his real life, I mean. But I am just Toni; and I can't be happy without Dad. There is no life for me without him. When these long, dreary years are over, he will find the same old Toni waiting for him. A little lankier and more serious, perhaps; but still his pal, Toni!"

"Toni, your father has been unfortunate; but—there are some people who might envy him, in spite of all. I don't suppose you could, or would ever care for any one else—in that way."

"No," she replied slowly. "I don't think I ever

could. I am going to give my life to Dad. I want to make up to him for all he has suffered. So I feel I must give him all the love I could ever feel for other people. He must have it all. He needs it most."

"You write to him often?"

"Oh, yes! As often as he is allowed to receive letters; but I have a funny little fancy, silly perhaps I should call it, which helps me a great deal. I ——" She looked at him shyly.

"Let me hear it."

His voice was so kind, and there was a look of such wistful entreaty in his eyes, that she went on without hesitation.

"For a long, long time I have always felt that it was such a waste of time to sleep—if one didn't do anything. Even as a tiny child I thought that, when dusk crept over the sky, we were very near to other worlds; and that, when we fell asleep, we could go to those other worlds if we wished. I don't know where this notion came from. It sounds foolish, doesn't it?"

"Fantastic, but not altogether foolish," he answered indulgently.

"So every night I would say to myself, 'Now I will go to a beautiful, far-away world.' Of course, I could never remember anything of my wonderful

journeyings the next day; but I always felt that I had gone. It is such a comfort to me now to gratify this little whimsey of mine, for every night I imagine I can join Dad somewhere in a world of dreams, where everything is gold that glitters, and where one meets all the people one has loved. There we wander together along the farthest starriest way, far beyond the clouds."

Grandfather smiled. "It is a pretty fancy. What a pity you can't remember something about these starry expeditions when you return to the wide-awake world!"

"Yes," sighed Toni. "It would be glorious if I could actually *know* that I had seen Dad; to have a vivid remembrance of having been with him. But I don't think I come back empty-handed, or, rather, I should say, *empty-hearted*; for I believe there is something in my heart, vague and hazy, like the fragrance of some unknown flower, or the faint gleam of star-dust. Something that gives me the power of finding joy in each day, and helps me to straighten out the tangles of life. And, you know, life's tangles are full of rainbow-threads. Perhaps that is why I was able to extract so much happiness from this wonderful day. I couldn't help feeling happy, and I had to let my heart dance with the daffodils."

She rose and crossed to his chair. "It seems very strange to be talking to you in this way, Grandfather. I have never done it before with any one—but Dad."

He took her hand in his. "Toni, some day you might teach me how to find rainbow-threads in the tangles; if you don't think I am too old. Thank you for the—daffodils."

When she had gone, he glanced over his mail again. There was one letter still unopened. It was from the lawyer, Robert Jameson—his friend, "Jimmie." He read it over.

After a few lines of a friendly, personal nature, the writer continued:

My appeal for a re-trial for Hamilton has been granted. There is no doubt of our being able to prove his innocence; but, of course, we must expect the "law's delay" and all that sort of thing. However, Harding has succeeded in implicating the Vice President, Kershaw, who is being carefully watched. It is the most complicated piece of roguery I have ever come across. It took Harding to unearth it. There will be startling disclosures of perjury and bribery. Hamilton hadn't the ghost of a chance before.

Come down to New York soon, Hasty, and I'll explain it all to you.

JIMMIE.

Grandfather sat in silence for a few moments, tapping the letter gently on the arm of his chair.

“Jimmie may be too sanguine. I wish I could tell Toni, but I mustn’t let her know until Hamilton’s release is assured. If anything should miscarry, the disappointment would be terrible for her.”

He looked up to the curtained picture. “Ah, ’Toinette! I wonder if you understand! Have you met the child in her dream-journeys to the stars?”

CHAPTER XXII

DANTE, RAPHAEL, AND ALADDIN

A LARGE chestnut-tree marked the beginning of a narrow lane, which straggled from the main street down to the beach. The outspreading boughs were laden with spiral blossoms, and the breeze had smoothed out all the fluted folds of the fan-like leaves.

On the right side of the lane was Porky Thompson's home. The square brick house, with a mansard roof and green-shuttered windows, stood near the street. The kitchen-garden and orchard lay behind the house, and edged upon the lane until it joined the sandy garden of Cyrus Grant, a Peacedale fisherman.

On the left side of the lane Jim Trefethen's orchard looked over a high white picket-fence on the street; and beyond the foamy sea of pink-and-white bloom was the house. Jim's gate was half-way down the lane, so that the house did not seem to belong to the street, but nestled among the trees, with its front windows looking to-

wards the sea. A garden sloped from the house to the beach, which was known as Trefethen's Cove. In this garden Ma's flowers and Jim's vegetables held friendly conference together. Where the sand and shells of the beach touched the coarse grass which fringed the garden, there were two frames on which Jim stretched his nets. Near by stood the little red boat-house, with a narrow landing the piles of which were encrusted with barnacles.

Jim and Ma were in the garden when Toni entered the gate with her school-books on her arm. She waved a letter in one hand.

"I've just had a letter from Lex," she cried. "So I ran in to read it to you."

Ma rose from the shady bench where she had been knitting.

"Sit down, Toni. I'll bring out some raspberry cordial. Jim has been working at the garden since dinner-time, so it's about time he had a rest."

Jim washed his hands at the pump, and presently Ma returned with a tray covered with a red-and-white fringed cloth, and containing three glasses of deep-red cordial and a plate of cookies.

Toni read the letter to them, and after they had talked about Lex, Jim stood up.

"Say, Toni, I've got something to show you. Just step inside."

They all went into the quaint little parlor.

"I sent off some more soap-coupons last week, and I just got the busts to-day."

He took a small bust from the top of the "Home University" shelves.

"Here's Garibaldi. I've been reading about him lately, so I thought I'd like to have him in my Hall of Fame. I've been trying for months to get an Emerson, but every time I've sent in coupons the soap-firm has been out of Emersons. This time they had one left, but the nose was chipped off, so they sent me Dante instead."

Jim's pronunciation gave but one syllable to the name of the illustrious Florentine.

"I'm not acquainted with *Dant*, but I'll look him up in the 'Home University.' He's sure to be there if he's any good, though I don't think much of his face."

"He was a great Italian poet," explained Toni.

"By gum! Have I got to learn Italian to read him?" exclaimed Jim.

Toni laughed. "Oh, no! You can get a translation—by Longfellow—if you like."

"Well, I'll try it. He must be worth while, or Longfellow wouldn't have bothered about him. I tell you, Toni, there's nothing like reading good books. It's like giving your soul a bath. Emer-

son now; one sentence of him just fills you with wisdom. It is like drawing in a deep breath of fresh air when the sun is shining and the wind is blowing everything clean. Emerson opens the windows of your mind and blows away the dust.

“Now, here’s somethin’ else that’s new; and I guess you’ll like it. It cost me seventy-five cents, and it’s called ‘Famous Madonnas’; it gives pictures of the whole Madonna family.”

He turned over the leaves of the illustrated booklet slowly.

“The thing that puzzles me is that they don’t look alike. No one would ever think they were related, which, of course, they must be, since they’re all Madonnas. It’s an Irish name, I guess.”

Toni smiled, but remained silent.

“There!” He showed her the Sistine Madonna. “Now that might be Ma herself! By gum! I wish that artist would come here for the summer. Lots of painting-fellows do. If this man, Raffle, came along, he could have his room and board free, if he’d paint a picture of Ma in exchange. I guess he’d be glad to do it on those terms; for I never met an artist yet who didn’t hesitate somewhat in paying his board-bill.”

They went back to the garden and Jim resumed his weeding. “Now, Ma, look here! See what

you've left in the pansy-bed! a husky bit of weed."

"Leave it alone, Jim," responded Ma with a smile. "I hadn't the heart to pull it out. Poor despised thing! It is doing its best. I suppose I'm foolish, but it hurts me to pull up weeds, though, of course, it has to be done. I can't help thinking of how the first little leaves rejoiced when they reached up through the dark mold and saw the blue sky and the sunlight. Perhaps it didn't know it was only a weed. It may have dreamed of becoming a beautiful flower. And so it struggles and grows and does its best, only to be torn from its home and cast away to wither. It is a failure in the flower-world. And I'm always sorry for the failures."

"There are lots of things in this world that's hard to understand," observed Jim. "Failure, sorrow, and sin. And some folks wonder why the Lord allows such things to be. Now, I reckon it this way. It may be that even the Lord couldn't make the world perfect. He gave the world a pretty good start, and then it had to grow by itself. Now, if I plant a tree, I give it good soil, fertilizer, and a support; but, by gum! the tree's got to do its own growing."

Toni nodded her head. "You're right, Jim."

“And yet folks kick about life, and wonder why there’s so much evil. It would be a good sight better if they’d wonder at the good, the beauty, the joy, and the love in the world! Just think what a blessing light is! But we take it without thinking of the wonder of it. Yet if we had to pay a gas-bill for daylight, we’d see some value in it.”

“Many folks haven’t thought things out the way you have, Jim,” said Ma. “It seems to me that you’d make a good preacher. I think we are all like little children learning to walk. We stumble and fall and hurt ourselves, just as a little child does when he is trying to balance himself. He cries, but he doesn’t give up trying. Perhaps he understands in some strange way that if the earth wasn’t hard enough to hurt him when he fell, it wouldn’t be hard enough for him to walk on.”

“It’s difficult to look at it in that way when one has just had a bad fall,” said Toni.

“Yes, I know.” Ma gently pressed the girl’s hand. “But pain is really the wrong side of joy.”

They sat in silence and Jim continued his weeding.

“Say, Toni, next Saturday I want to take some of you young folks for a sail over to Portland. There are several battle-ships in the harbor, and it’ll

be a sight worth seeing. I'll come over with Polly Feemus and drive Basil here, and the three of you will have dinner with us. Then we'll sail through Casco Bay. I spoke to Kathryn Lindsay and Floss Thompson, and they're crazy to go; and I guess Teddy Hale and Bobby Sterling will be with us, too."

"That will be lovely, Jim!" cried Toni. "I've been longing to see the battle-ships. It will be a glorious treat. I hope the weather will not disappoint us."

The following Saturday was beautifully clear with the freshness of May; and early in the afternoon a joyous party of seven young people started off with Ma and Jim in his big sail-boat. Lazy white clouds were like ships becalmed in the blue sky. The sea was sparkling with sunlight, and the islands were green and fresh, as if they had just risen in virgin splendor from the sea; a group of Aphrodites clad in emerald glory.

The great white-and-yellow battle-ships were lying at anchor, and small craft sailed or steamed by with an air of busy importance.

"If there's one thing in this world I don't like, it's a motor-boat," observed Jim, as one noised by them. "I'd think I was insulting the ocean if I had one of them."

"They're very useful and speedy," said Florence Thompson.

"That's true. But I don't like the way they rip through the waves, as if the ocean was a bit of rotten flannel for them to cut to pieces. It is rip, rip, rip, with them. Puff, puff, puff, they go. Each blooming gasoline launch seems to be saying as loud as it can: 'The sea is mine and I made it.'"

"There's something so romantic about a sail-boat," said Toni. "We go skimming along as if we were borne by the wings of a wonderful bird. We can hear the splash and swirl of the waters, and feel that we are a part of the sea; and the salt wind is the breath of heaven," she finished with a deep-drawn breath.

Presently Jim pulled down the sails and they drifted between two battle-ships, spotless and shining. On slanting lines, stretched from masts to decks, hung middies and trousers, flapping in the wind. The decks were lined with sailors, most of whom were leaning over the railing, gazing down upon the passing boats.

"They all seem to be asleep," said Kathryn. "Let's wake them up with 'The Star-Spangled Banner.'"

Teddy and Bobby took out their mouth-organs and began to play. The others sang with patriotic

fervor, but there was no sign of interest shown by the sailors. Then they sang "My Country 'tis of Thee," but still the boys in blue failed to respond.

"One would think we were performing dirges, they look so solemn. It is exasperating," Toni remarked, when a lusty singing of "Columbia the Gem of the Ocean" had been greeted with the same disappointing apathy.

"I thought they would at least take their hats off," said Cecily.

"Perhaps they are all deaf," Bobby grinned.

"How would it be if we threw kisses at them?" asked Kathryn with a merry chuckle.

"Oh, Kathryn!" protested Florence.

"I'd do almost anything to wake them up," replied Kathryn.

"They are so lifeless and still, they look as if they were painted on the sides of the ship," said Basil.

Ma smiled. "Try them with 'Has Anybody Here Seen Kelly?'"

"I bet a ham sandwich to a lobster salad that 'Kelly' will rouse them," laughed Bobby.

"Kelly" succeeded. Every sailor had apparently seen Kelly and liked him immensely. Perhaps each sailor was the immortal Kelly himself! Off came the hats. The boys danced and cheered;

and when the song ended there was a burst of vociferous applause.

"So much for the loyalty and patriotism of our country's defenders," remarked Toni with a laugh.

Jim raised the great white sail and they departed with a waving of hats and handkerchiefs. The daring Kathryn threw a kiss, to which the sailors, now roused and interested, responded nobly. They returned the salutation, and cheered again and again, until the sailing-party had passed out of sight.

They had brought their supper with them in baskets, and picnicked on Peak's Island, under the willows at the back of the summer theatre.

"I wish it would hurry and grow dark, for I'm longing to see the searchlight drill," said Florence, brushing some crumbs from her lap.

Across the bay the city seemed afire with the glow of a crimson sunset. The tide was out, and strips of seaweed, left by the receding waves, lay on the beach. The bay was incarnadined with the sun's splendor. Little ripples, drifting from the swell of a passing steamer, lost themselves in a faint whisper on the sand, and then everything was still.

"Recite something, Toni," suggested Ma.

Toni leaned against the trunk of the great willow, and looked towards the sunset. In subdued tones she recited Longfellow's "My Lost Youth":

“And the beauty and mystery of the ships,
And the magic of the sea.
And the voice of the wayward song
Is singing and saying still:
‘A boy’s will is the wind’s will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts.’ ”

The bay was like a sheet of crimson and gold under a shimmering haze of amethyst. The colors softened, and gray shadows stole over the water. At the end of the poem there was a hush; and then, with a deep, long sigh, the tide turned. Little waves crept in shyly. The sun disappeared, and from the fort came the boom of the sunset gun. The dusk deepened into purple, and one little star shone like a drop of liquid gold. Lights began to twinkle from the city, and the lanterns on vessels at anchor gleamed like runaway stars that had wandered from the sky. Suddenly the battle-ships, which were like bulky shadows, blazed forth with incandescent lights.

“ Oh! they look as if every bit of the rigging were strung with stars!” cried Toni.

“ It’s a naval fairyland,” added Teddy Hale.

“ I guess we’ll get back to the ‘ Rosemary,’ ” said Jim. “ And we’ll drift out a bit.”

By the time they were settled in the boat it was quite dark. Long shafts of silvery light streamed from the ships, and the searchlight drill began.

There were endless exclamations of "Oh's" and "Ah's," as they watched the shifting splendor. The vast rays crossed and re-crossed, weaving themselves into a web of radiance, and embroidering the sky with fantastic designs as they flashed up and down.

"Wouldn't it seem strange to some old astronomer of ancient times, Copernicus for instance, if he could suddenly see, without understanding the cause, all these shooting lights?" said Toni. "He would think the planetary system had gone mad; that the meteors were drunk; and the comets were crazy."

"'And certain stars shot madly from their spheres,' as Shakespeare, Milton, or some other old Johnny said," laughed Teddy.

"Oh! how wonderful it has been!" cried Toni, as a breeze seized their sails and carried them away. "You have given us an Arabian Night entertainment, Jim,—full of joy and splendor. We have been watching the magic of Aladdin's Lamp!"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE FIRE OF DRIFTWOOD AND A LONELY STAR

THE poplar walk led from the west side of the house to the pine forest, which clothed the rocky promontory stretching far into the sea. The walk was paved with red brick, greened over with moss and laid in zigzag, "herring-bone" patterns. Tall, slender poplars stood in serried lines. A sea-born breeze kept their leaves quivering, but there was no sound of rustling among the boughs.

One afternoon Mr. Hastings, according to his daily custom, paced along the poplar walk; and Toni, tossing her school-books on a circular seat under an apple-tree, joined him.

"May I walk and talk with you for a little while, Grandfather?"

He nodded with an acquiescent smile, and she walked beside him when he turned towards the forest.

"Don't these poplars seem like soldiers standing at attention as you pass by? Doesn't it make you feel like some monarch, with the Royal Guard in uniforms of green on either side of you?"

"That fancy hadn't occurred to me," replied Grandfather.

"Look at that silver poplar ahead of us! He has his boughs outspread, instead of holding them pointed stiffly upward, as these well-trained poplars do. We must have him court-martialed. When the king and princess pass by, he should not stand in that lackadaisical way. But perhaps he is a Walter Raleigh, throwing his cloak of shade over the bricks for us to walk on."

They had reached the end of the walk before she spoke again. "Grandfather," she said when they began to retrace their steps, "do you remember, when I first came here, that you spoke of my learning stenography and typewriting?"

A muttered growl was his only response, and she continued: "You said I might take a course at a business college when I had finished my work at the Academy; but, if you don't mind, I should like to begin now. In a few days the holidays will be here, and I could go to Portland two or three times a week for lessons. All winter I have been studying shorthand by myself; but I should like to take it up seriously now, and rent a typewriter, so that I could practice at home during the summer."

"What is your reason for wanting to begin now?"

Toni hesitated. "You see, Grandfather, I —— Well, I want to do something real and worth while with my life; and I don't want to fritter my summer away. I want to get something started right away."

"Then you are ambitious to be a typist and stenographer?" he asked, glancing at her sharply.

"My ambition reaches higher than that, Grandfather. I'm afraid I have propped my ladder against a cloud, because I want to reach up to the stars—some day. Still, typing and 'stenogging' will help me to climb; they may prove the first rungs on the ladder. Anyway, I want to work now. I want to begin to climb. I—I hope you don't object, Grandfather."

He looked down at her pleading face. It was so bright and eager and girlish; and yet in the dark eyes there lurked a little shadow, a hint of the poignant sorrow which had darkened her young life. Even her smiling lips were curved with a vague suggestion of hidden pain.

"H'm! I don't see any reason against it," he said.

Toni clapped her hands. "Then I may begin at once? If you will pay for the lessons, I can pay for renting the typewriter with the allowance you give me."

"No, keep your allowance. I'll buy a type-

writer, and you can pay for it by doing some work for me when you have learned to use the machine properly."

"Oh! let me be your secretary and help you with your book."

"Not too soon, young lady! I don't want my manuscripts spoiled with a novice's blunders."

"I can't thank you enough with words, Grandfather. But I'll work hard and try to show my gratitude with deeds. Thank you, Grandfather; you've started me on the ladder. May I begin next week?"

"Yes. I'll make arrangements for you at once."

The following Monday, Toni began her lessons. She went to Portland three mornings a week, and practised sedulously on the typewriter every day. This entailed some sacrifice, for it was hard to remain indoors when June was wooing the world outside.

All the promises of April and May were fulfilled in this month of roses. The pink-tinted snows of Maytime had drifted from the blossoming boughs; but the lilacs still wore their plumes, and the laurels were a glory of waxen chalices. Mornings came from the east in rosy clouds, and tripped over the sea, leaving golden footprints behind. The hours were a mingled delight of bird-songs and roses.

Each day, like a child weary of play, sank to sleep as if too tired to gather up the crimson clouds which were scattered like toys in the western corner of the sky. The nights were fragrant and dewy, filled with the dreamy enchantment of moonlight.

Lex came up from Boston for a week-end in June.

"How you have changed!" cried Cecily, when she met him at the station with Toni and Jim.

"I believe you are getting handsome," added Toni, with twinkling eyes.

"And you'll soon be calling your hair auburn instead of red, Alexander," laughed Jim.

Lex rubbed his closely-cropped head with a rueful smile. "Jim, you're a flatterer; for every hair upon my head is crimson, ruddy, and plain red! You see what Boston has done for me! I'm breaking out in rhyme. How is Ma? I'm dying for one of her dumplings!"

"And you'll have 'em to-night," replied Jim. "Stewed chicken and dumplings tops the me-n-you. All you young folks are going to have supper with Ma and me. Basil is at the house with Ma now."

On the way to Jim's cottage they were frequently waylaid with greetings and congratulations for Lex.

"My grief and patience!" exclaimed Mandy

Fly. "If this ain't Alexander! Well, what do yuh know about that? I'd never've known yuh, Alexander. My, but yuh've filled out some since yuh went to Boston! Well, well, well! Yuh used to be skinnier than the peddler's blind horse. Now yuh must come over while yuh're in Peacedale and have a bite with me and Steve. Well, well, well!"

"Seems like you were getting popular, Alexander," said Jim as they went along.

"I imagine my blue serge suit won Mandy," replied Lex. "She never noticed me before, in the days of the old gray Norfolk. Clothes certainly count for something."

"Sure-lee!" said Jim. "A book with good binding always draws attention."

"I think good clothes help one's own feelings, too," observed Cecily. "When I feel blue, I always put on my best dress and a fresh hair-ribbon; and if I add my bronze slippers and silk stockings, I feel jositively poyful—I mean positively joyful!"

"I believe Mandy Fly dresses according to her own mood on Sundays," remarked Toni. "When she looks particularly shrewish and Steve has a whipped-dog expression, Mandy always wears that black hat trimmed with little plumes, which looks like a small hearse. I know then that the weather

is stormy. When she wears the yellow straw trimmed with crimson poppies and lilacs, a combination most devoutly to be loathed, the barometer says 'bright and clear,' and Steve looks happy."

"Oh! I see Tom Potts has painted his house!" cried Lex, as they passed the blacksmith's home.

"Yes," replied Jim. "The house has been baptized with paint, and they've given it a name. 'The Oaks,' they call it; but since there isn't an oak in sight of the place, I call it, 'The Hoax.' There's a lot of rank and tone about a place when it has a name; so the other day I told Ma I thought I'd call our house 'The Cedars,' because there's a plum-tree near the back door. I tell you, Alexander, Peacedale folks are getting to be real nifty since you went away. The Pottses have painted their house and got an ice-cream freezer; Obe Brimson's wife bought a set of curtain-stretchers the other day; and Mrs. Burtis has been singing in the choir since she got a gold tooth put in."

They all laughed, and Lex inquired: "What are you and Ma doing to keep in the social swim?"

"Well, except for having a phonograph, we haven't done anything so far; though I kind of suggested to Ma this morning that we'd have to get busy and keep up with the rest of the folks. So I'm going to order a fireless cooker for Ma; and I'm

thinking of getting a safety razor for myself. That ought to help some."

After supper they all went down to the beach, where they were joined by Kathryn, Florence, Teddy, and Bobby. When it grew dark, they built a huge bonfire of driftwood, and told stories, sang songs, and toasted marshmallows.

The waves came in with a swish and a splash; and the fire sent out long streamers of light over the water. On the dark shadow of the promontory burned a small light, the lamp which shone night after night from Rachel Lee's lonely cottage, which nestled at the foot of the high stone cliff. Far across the dark waste the light of Sheep Island lighthouse revolved in the high tower, and flashed intermittently, like the winking eye of a Cyclops.

Bobby, who loved to tease the girls, made up limericks at their expense, which brought out bursts of laughter from all. Toni was the first victim.

"There was a young lady named Toni,
Whose legs were so long and so bony
That both of her knees
Reached the Antipodes;
So she never could ride on a pony."

"My poor legs!" groaned Toni in mock despair.

"There's nothing you can say about me!" cried Kathryn. "I am just an ordinary person. I

haven't long legs, or a hare-lip; and I haven't been freckled at all this summer. So there's nothing for you to rhyme about!"

Bobby thought for a few seconds. "Here goes:

"There was a young lady named Lindsay,
Who wore a dress made of brown wincey;
There was scorn in her eye
As she sniffed towards the sky,
Till her neck had developed a quinsy."

Kathryn looked about at the others. "Can't some one retaliate? Lex, come forward and slay this creature."

"No," replied Lex. "I see the fire of inspiration gleaming in Bobby's eye; and it isn't the reflection of our bonfire, either. His genius would sparkle again. Out with it, Bobus!"

"There was a young lady named Florence,
Who looked upon worms with abhorrence.
At the sight of an eel
She would give a loud squeal;
And her tears would descend in wild torrents."

"I know you can't possibly make a limerick about me!" cried Cecily. "There isn't anything you can think of to rhyme with my name. You're stumped with 'Cecily.'"

"Am I, indeed?" scoffed Bobby. "'I was born under a rhyming planet.' Just listen!"

“There was a young lady named Cecily
Who was born on a mountain in Thessaly.
Whenever she spoke,
Her words twisted and broke;
So we only could understand—‘guessily.’ ”

“ Oh! ” they chorused.

“ Girls, let’s throw him in the fire or duck him in the sea! ” exclaimed Kathryn.

“ No, wait a moment! ” said Toni, and she began:

“There once was a heathen named Bobby,
And limericks were his mad hobby.
His conceit and his verse
Became steadily worse,
But he thought all his rhymes were quite nobby.”

“ Hurray! ” cried the girls.

The tide had gone out and left a wide stretch of hard, level sand.

“ Let us have a dance, ” suggested Toni; and they joyfully agreed.

Lex and Teddy ran up to the house for Jim’s phonograph and they brought out all his records of popular music. Basil, whose infirmity precluded him from dancing, kept the music humming as the others whirled about in two-steps, waltzes, and fancy dances.

Lex insisted on having Ma as a partner. “ Come along, Ma! I’ve had dancing-lessons in Boston; so I won’t tread on your toes or tear your frills. ” He

made a most elaborate bow, with all the pomposity of a Turveydrop.

There was something eerie about the scene, as the moving figures danced in and out of the fire-light. The moon distorted their shadows, and sometimes the lanky, grotesque forms seemed to touch the sky.

"This beats the witches in 'Macbeth,'" said Jim, as he threw another log on the fire, and the sparks scattered like golden dust.

The next day was Saturday, and Mr. Hastings had given his consent for a tea-party to be held in Lex's honor. Only Kathryn, Florence, Teddy, and Bobby had been invited, and they had tea on the lawn, under one of the old apple-trees.

"Land's sakes!" exclaimed Delia when Toni invaded her sanctum in the morning and offered to help in the preparations. "It's the first time there's ever been a sign of a party since I lived in this house, and that's the length of my life! The old gentleman's gettin' human. When Miss Hastings told me the other day that there was goin' to be a party, I felt like the Day o' Judgment was comin'. I'm real glad that I can show folks what don't live in this house that I'm as good a cook as any in Peacedale."

"Don't you need some help, Delia?"

"No, you leave it all to me, and I'll show you

what's what. It's not pride and vain-glory that speaks when I say that I'm a good cook; it's the truth, and to-day truth will prevail! But all the same, I just can't understand folks eatin' out of doors when the Lord has given them a roof to cover their heads. There'll be bugs in the butter, and worms in the whipped cream, and mosquitoes a-whizzin' and dippin' into everything, like the plagues of Egypt. And I do think it's a temptation for the Devil to get to work when folks eat ice-cream, freezin' their vittles and their vitals and turnin' themselves into refrigerators."

On Sunday evening Lex and Toni strolled through the woods to watch the sunset. The promontory reached out and formed a large bay, which gave Peacedale its irregular crescent shape; and from the furthest point was a westward view towards the mainland, lying like a strip of shadow between the sky and the sea.

They saw Rachel Lee sitting on the shore, still waiting and watching after all the weary years.

"We'll stay up here where we won't disturb her," said Toni; and they sat at the foot of a hoary pine. "How gray she looks, and she is so still that she might be a figure carved from the rocks."

"Yes, she reminds me of that wonderful work of St. Gaudens,—'Grief,'" answered Lex. "I

wonder if she realizes the hopelessness of it all as she sits there; or does her poor, crazed mind give her a sort of childish expectation that her husband and the boys are coming back?"

"Ma says that occasionally she has paroxysms of anxious dread, and wonders if anything has happened to them; though she doesn't realize the time that has elapsed since they went away. Usually she is in a state of dull apathy, her senses numbed and frozen. She waits night after night; and when the morning comes, she turns out the light and says, 'They will come to-day when the sun goes down.' So every evening she sets the table for four, and then goes out to watch for them. Oh! it is terribly sad. Poor, lonely old woman!"

Lex spoke of Dr. Drummond's goodness to him, and of the plans for his education. "It's strange how things work out for good, Toni. Last winter my illness, coming when it did, seemed the most terrible calamity that could have befallen me. It destroyed my last chance, I thought; but see what has come of it! Your grandfather's generosity brought Dr. Drummond here, and my life has been completely changed. I feel like some prince in a fairy-tale, who had lived for years under a spell of awful enchantment, and then had been suddenly freed from the hateful bondage. Now I am free

to do the work I love; and if I succeed, I am going to help other boys who are struggling for an education. That is my dream."

As they talked, day expired in the west, like an ancient warrior of the North sailing to Valhalla in a ship of fire. A cool wind shuddered among the pines. The dusk of twilight crept over the mother-of-pearl sky, and the opalescent shimmer of the bay was dimmed, as if a breath had dulled its mirror-like surface. A coil of smoke rose from Jim's cottage, curling and vanishing into the vastness of the sky.

Toni rose with a slight shiver. "How chilly it has grown!"

"Toni, do you know, Rachel hasn't shifted her position since we came. I'm going down to her. You had better stay here."

"No, I'll go, too."

They carefully descended a little twisted path on the side of the cliff, and approached the silent figure. Rachel sat motionless on a rock, and waves crept in unheeded to her feet. She wore a large gray shawl draped over her head and hanging in loose folds to the sand.

"Rachel!" whispered Toni.

A wave receded with a soft murmur, as if repeating her utterance.

The woman did not give the quick, startled-bird movement which was her habit when accosted by others. Lex reached out and gently touched her on the shoulder. There was no response. The sad, wrinkled face still gazed out to sea, with eyes wide-open, despairing, unseeing.

The boy took off his cap.

"Her watching is over," he said in broken tones. A lonely star shone through the darkening sky.

Toni pointed upward. "Rachel's lamp burns there now!"

CHAPTER XXIV

REED-GRASS AND ROSES

June 23rd.

DEAR, BELOVED DADDY:

This is a perfect day for a birthday, breezy and sparkling. The garden is decorated with millions of roses in my honor. The sun is smiling in the sky and pouring down golden congratulations. Of course, a person born on June twenty-third—Midsummer Eve—must have all the good fairies for god-parents; for it is the fairy day of the year! And this Toni-person is sixteen years old to-day.

Your darling letter came yesterday, but I didn't open it until this morning, so my day began with a joy.

Grandfather gave me a wonderful little escritoire, which Antoinette the First used many years ago. It is beautifully inlaid with mother-of-pearl, and there is a funny little drawer which can be locked. All your letters are there. It is a dream of a box, quaint and Japanesy. The inside is of sandalwood. Just sniff this paper! Doesn't it make you think of Persian spices and roses?

Grandfather must have loved the French Antoinette. There was such a sad, hungry expression in his eyes when he gave me the escritoire this morning. It made me want to cry.

When I attempted to thank him, he *boshed* and *tutted* and *bahed*, and told me to clear out. I believe he likes me a little, or he wouldn't have given me this treasure.

The other day Aunt Olivia told Cecily a story about Grandfather. Years ago, at college, he had a great friend. It was a Damon and Pythias plus David and Jonathan affair. At least it was on Grandfather's side. There was some private scandal about card-playing, and in some way Grandfather was involved. By speaking a word this friend might have cleared him. He remained silent. Of course, the trouble was set right. Grandfather was exonerated and the friend was proven a cad. The disappointment made Grandfather morbid and queer. He lost faith in every one. Several years afterwards he married 'Toinette. Her leaving him has always been a mystery. Poor, lonely old man!

This morning I took a holiday, and the typewriter was silent. Usually my morning hours are noisy with clicks and taps, as if I were conducting a symphony orchestra of woodpeckers; but to-day I forgot my work.

For the past week the weather has been peaceful—dull and quiet. The ocean was calm and smooth, as if it were a sea of soothing-syrup. Nature seemed like a lazy housekeeper, and the world became hot and dusty. Last night everything was washed with rain; and this morning a brisk, salty wind dusted the air and made the sea wrinkle with waves.

So the fairy part of me lured me outside and led

me to the woods. It is a wonderful place—a forest primeval. The pines form a vast, dim cathedral. The green boughs with glimpses of blue sky are stained-glass windows, with sunlight drifting through with a hazy shimmer. The murmuring roar of the ocean is like the muffled din of street-noises outside. There are great rocks, tomb-shaped, with lichened inscriptions, and the floor is paved with a mosaic of brown needles. A delicious piney smell provides the incense, and little flowers blossom in the shadows like candles.

I spent my morning there, and I listened to a sermon preached by an ancient pine—"a Druid of eld."

I have written the sermon out for you, because there is a message in it which I want you to share. So it passes through my heart into yours. It is my birthday dream-gift to you.

TONI.

REED-GRASS AND ROSES

A Song of the Wind.

A wind crept through the gates of dawn and drifted over the world.

O waning stars in the sky,
O wandering wind of the morn!

Dew hung like kisses on the lips of all the roses. Their breath sweetened the air with fragrance. The day was gilded with sunlight.

O day of rapture and roses,
O honey and wine of the roses!

The wind gathered the roses and tossed them in the air. They floated down in showers of loosened petals, caressing the wind with their sweetness.

O blossoming roses of pleasure,
O perfume and pride of the roses!

The hours drifted by. The fires of the sun died in the western sky, and night covered the last glowing embers with ashy clouds.

O hidden thorns of the roses,
O dust and the withered roses!

The wind moaned and wandered under the shadowy trees. A pool of tears lay beneath the dusk of entangled boughs. Reed-grasses, slender and tall, fringed the edge of the pool.

No roses and sparkle of sunlight,
O gloom and the reedy grasses!

The heart of the pool stirred faintly. A ripple whispered among the reeds.

"I have no roses of pleasure, no shimmering smiles of sunlight," murmured the pool. "Sometimes I catch the gleam of a star, or a ray from a wandering moonbeam, or mirror the blue of the distant sky. Soft mists float over in silence and linger among the grasses, like wraiths of lost desires and dreams of the withered roses. Here you may gather reed-grasses."

The wind plucked a handful of reeds and sighed.

O dead delights of the roses,
O grasses and reeds of sorrow!

A strange, sweet music hovered in the air and floated into the silent darkness.

O music of sorrow and sighing,
O hidden music of reed-grass!

The wind rejoiced, for he knew he had discovered the secret of song. He tied the reeds together and went through the world, playing on his magic pipes.

The world listened and marveled at his music.

“He plays upon common reed-grasses, the reeds of sorrow, which we throw away!” And they wondered still more at the wistful harmonies, the sad, sweet music of their forgotten dreams.

O music and memory of roses,
The sweet, faded roses of pleasure!
O music of dreams and desires,
Of grief and unsatisfied longings!
O magical mystery of song
In the reedy grasses of sorrow!

CHAPTER XXV

'TOINETTE'S SECRET

IT was a broiling afternoon. The flowers drooped under the pitiless glare of the sun, and the trees stood with listless branches, their leaves wilted and dusty. The sea glittered like molten brass. A feeble breeze came through the open windows of the study, like a blast of hot air from a furnace.

It had been a weary day for Toni. All morning she had typed for Grandfather. She was proud of her work, and brought the manuscript to the study after dinner. The fervid heat of August weather had given him a severe headache, and shadows of pain darkened his eyes.

The shutters were closed, but shafts of sunlight came through the cracks and sprinkled golden gleams on the polished floor. A bee flew into the room and buzzed about, as if repeating the gossip of the flowers.

Toni read her work aloud, and then her grandfather examined the sheets. They were models of neatness as regards the typing, but in reading them

over she had unconsciously smudged many of the pages with her hot, perspiring fingers.

"Bah!" said Grandfather impatiently. "Must be done over again."

Toni sighed and began to gather up the spoiled pages.

He pushed back his hair with a weary gesture. "I wonder if you would ask Delia to make some tea. Don't let her bring it in. Come with it yourself. Leave the typing until to-morrow."

"But, Grandfather, I thought you wanted to send these chapters off to-morrow morning. I—I will do them over when I have brought you the tea."

"My dear child! I feel like throwing the work and the typewriter into the sea. Bring plenty of tea for both, and we'll forget all about work."

She went out to the kitchen, where she found Delia, flushed and perspiring, over the ironing-table, and singing:

"Down in a cool and sha-a-a-dy dell,
A modest violet gr-ew-oo."

"Oh, Delia, how can you iron and sing on such a day as this?" Toni asked, as she filled the kettle and placed it on the stove, which was red-hot with a steady coal fire.

"Well, I'm not going to let the Devil have it all his own way with the heat," replied Delia imper-

turbably. "I'll show him what's what. So I'm baking bread and burning coal, like I was his first cousin. 'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou bake bread,' says the Lord. So I'm doing it; for He maketh the deep to boil like a pot! But I'm not going to quit my work for any weather; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday."

Toni arranged a tray and carried the tea into the study. She poured it in the thin Japanese cups.

"Oh! the cream has turned sour!" she exclaimed in regretful tones, as the cream wriggled in the tea like a collection of tiny worms.

She poured out a fresh cup and he took it from her with a sigh of relief.

"Shall I get some lemon?"

"No." He closed his eyes and sipped the tea slowly.

"Grandfather, will you lie down and let me stroke your forehead? I used to do it for Dad, and he always declared it cured his headaches. Let me try!"

"Bah! too hot."

"I'll go and cool my hands with ice from the refrigerator, may I?"

He nodded, and a frown of pain cleft his forehead.

She soon returned, with hands reddened and tingling from immersion in icy water. She passed her cool, smooth fingers over the throbbing brow and through the soft rings of silvery hair.

Poor old Grandfather! How thin and pale he looked! Little beads of perspiration stood on his upper lip, and his mouth was contracted with pain. Soon his soft, regular breathing informed her that he slept; but she sat quietly beside the couch, fearing to disturb him if she moved.

The study-door was open, and presently she saw Cecily's face in the shadowy hall. She beckoned to Toni, who rose carefully and went into the hall.

"Oh, Toni, I don't know what you will say!" she began with a tearful whisper. "Just come upstairs."

Cecily wore a blue muslin kimono, and her damp hair floated about her shoulders.

"What is the matter?" asked Toni, as they tiptoed from the hall.

"I had washed my hair, and I wanted to write some letters while it was drying. So I dragged the table close to the window, and that dear little *escritoire* Grandfather gave you ——"

"Oh, Cecily! Don't say it fell off the table!"

"Y-y-yes," gasped Cecily. "I'm so sorry!"

Toni rushed along the corridor to their room.

The lovely little desk was on the floor, and chips of the beautiful mother-of-pearl lay beside it.

"I—I'm awfully sorry! I didn't try to pick it up. I'm afraid the bottom is broken," said Cecily mournfully.

"Oh, my dear little desk!" groaned Toni, as she knelt on the floor.

Cecily began to weep. "Oh! I wish you'd lose your temper, Toni! Say something mean. Knock my head off, pull my hair or my nose. Don't be such an angel and a saint! Swear, cuss, kick, or scream! *Do something!*"

Toni smiled sadly. "It wouldn't do any good to storm. Besides, I think my old Toni-tempers are things of the past."

"I wish you wouldn't be so sweet about it," protested Cecily. "Be human!"

Toni carefully lifted the *escritoire* back to the table, and Cecily helped to gather up the mother-of-pearl chips.

"All these pieces can be glued on again," remarked Toni. "I'll put them in the drawer, where they'll be safe. And I'm sure Jim can mend the bottom. So don't worry, Cecily."

Cecily hugged her. "I feel like weeping over you, as Mrs. Kenwigs did over her children, and saying, 'You're too good to live!'"

Toni laughed and attempted to pull out the drawer of the desk.

"H'm! it's stuck!" she cried. "Here, Cecily, you hold it up carefully at this side, while I try to loosen the drawer."

Cecily complied, and presently the drawer came out half-way and stuck again.

"Why! what's this?" exclaimed Toni. "There's a space under the drawer—a secret compartment! I didn't know about that."

She pushed back a sliding piece of wood beneath the drawer.

"There's something inside!" cried Cecily, peering in.

Toni's slim fingers pulled out a folded piece of yellowed note-paper. It was covered with faint, delicate handwriting. She glanced at it. "My Dear Husband:" the writing began.

She refolded it quickly and looked at Cecily with startled eyes.

"It's —— Oh! it must be a letter written to Grandfather by 'Toinette. It is like a message from the dead! I'll take it down to him. He couldn't have known it was there."

She left the astonished Cecily and ran down to the study. Grandfather had awakened, and the shutters were thrown open. A breeze fluttered the

curtains and brought in a soft, cool scent of coming rain. He sat by one of the windows, and turned to her with a tender smile as she entered.

“Your healing touch has worked a miracle, Toni! My headache has disappeared. Why, my child, what is the matter?”

She stood before him with quivering lips and quick, panting breaths. Her cheeks were pale, and misty tears filled her eyes.

“Grandfather, I——” She knelt beside his chair. “There is a secret compartment in the escritoire you gave me on my birthday, and I have just discovered it. There—was—something inside for—you.”

She placed the letter in his hand and was about to rise, but he restrained her with an impatient gesture.

“Stay! You say you found this in—’Toinette’s desk?”

“Yes, Grandfather.” She hid her face on his knee.

He read the letter over slowly. She could hear the faint rustling of the crisp paper, as if it were the whispering voice of the dead ’Toinette coming from the past, through the long distance of intervening years. Presently his hand sank on her shoulder.

"Poor little 'Toinette!" he murmured. "Poor little girl!"

He gently raised Toni's face between his hands and looked down into her eyes.

"Toni, you have taken a lifelong sorrow from my aching old heart. You have opened the windows of my darkened life and let in the air and sunlight. Oh, little girl, you can never realize what this letter means to me!"

She crept up to the arm of his chair and sat with her face pressed closely to his.

"Read the letter, dear. I want you to understand. We will read it together."

MY DEAR HUSBAND:

It is that I must go away, and you must not know why until I am gone. You will forgive me then. I am writing this with tears, because I love you.

Don't be too sorry about me. You will have our little Annette. I am not wise enough to be her mother or to be your wife. You are very wonderful and wise; and I am just a stupid little person who cannot even pretend to be clever.

You see, I always thought that it was enough in life just to be happy. Now I know that one ought to be wise, and not care so much about being happy.

Do you remember the little canary that used to sing so much and annoy you? Its cage was covered, so that the noise should not be so disturbing. It sang no more; and soon, very soon, it died.

I was a human canary, I think. My singing, my childish ways, and chatter were tiresome to you. I felt you did not approve of me, though you were always very kind. But it was a sad kindness; and presently I grew silent—like the poor little bird.

And now I know I am going to die very soon. I want to fly back to my old home. Here it is so gray, so sad! I could not bear to die here; and I do not wish you to see me suffer, as I know I must. Sometimes the pain is hard to bear now, and often I keep away from you, so that you may not understand and be sorry for me. Perhaps I am unwise, but you will forgive me, will you not? Just because I am only silly little 'Toinette.

When you come back from New York, you will not find me here. At first I fear you will be very angry. Please don't be angry very long!

Soon I shall be sleeping under the flowers of France, with the sunny blue skies far above. Let your thoughts of me be very gentle, as if they were little blossoms you would place on my grave.

Always, always remember that the stupid little 'Toinette loved you, though she was afraid to show it in her own foolish way. Some day we shall both understand.

Please open your heart as you read this, and let a little memory of me creep inside and keep it kind.

Ma chandelle est morte,
Je n'ai plus de feu:
Ouvrez-moi ta porte
Pour l'amour de Dieu!

'TOINETTE.

"Oh, Grandfather! how wonderful, how for-

fortunate, that this letter has reached you at last! If Cecily hadn't accidentally knocked the *escritoire* off the table, and loosened the bottom, this letter might never have been discovered. So you really owe it to Cecily!"

He pressed her hand. "No, I owe it to Toni; for if I hadn't learned to care for you, I shouldn't have given you the *escritoire*, and it would still be in the darkened room up-stairs. This has come, not through accident, but through the wonderful working-out of love. My child, I see, I understand at last. 'Toinette loved me after all!'"

She gave a soft little laugh, half-merry, half-tearful. "And all these tangled years have been changed into a rainbow."

The rain began to pelt on the parched grass outside, reviving the drooping flowers and crisping the flaccid leaves on the trees. There was a sweet smell of moist earth and grass, and all the flowers poured out their fragrance as a thank-offering for the blessing of the rain. Raindrops pattered on the sills and sent spitting showers into the room. Toni hurriedly closed the windows.

Grandfather stood beside her and took her hands in his. "Toni, there is wonderful news for you. Just before you came down with the letter, I had been wakened by Delia, who brought me a telegram

from a lawyer-friend of mine. He has been working for your father, and has succeeded in his appeal for a new trial in the fall. But the telegram tells me the trial will not be necessary. Kershaw has confessed and has been arrested. Your father is innocent."

"Dad! Oh, Grandfather!" she said, as she clung to him.

"Yes, dear. There are a few technical details to be attended to. A certain amount of red-tape must be unwound; and then your father will be free, and the world will know of his innocence. I am leaving for the South to-morrow. You have given me back 'Toinette, and I shall bring your father back to you."

"Oh! Oh!" She could feel her knees shaking. The walls, ceiling, and floor seemed to come together like a collapsible box; and everything grew dark. Toni fainted.

In a few moments she opened her eyes. Grandfather had opened the windows and the rain streamed into the room. She gasped with a choking laugh when she realized that the frightened old man was pouring a shower of cold tea over her face.

She sat up. "Oh, Grandfather! tea!"

"There was no water, so I seized the teapot," he laughed.

Outside the sun tore the clouds apart and shone forth, making the descending rain-drops like strings of prismatic beads.

"The storm is over!" cried Toni, inhaling a deep draught of the cool, wet air. "There will be a rainbow and a wonderful sunset. Oh! I'm so happy! My heart is like a nest of singing-birds caroling, 'Dad is free! Dad is free!'"

She threw her arms about her grandfather and gave him a vehement hug. "I love you, Grandfather! Your Toni loves you!"

He led her to the fireplace with the hidden picture above it.

"After many years love has come to me," he said softly; and he drew the dark green curtains aside.

Toni saw her grandmother's portrait for the first time. The French 'Toinette sat in a simple gown, twining a wreath of pink roses about her straw hat. Her black hair was piled loosely on top of her head, but two soft curls rested upon her right shoulder. The background was a misty bit of woodland, vague and shadowy.

"How lovely she was!" murmured Toni. "She looks as if she understood!"

"Yes, I think she understands," added Grandfather. "She knows that I have found Rainbow Gold at last!"

CHAPTER XXVI

PEBBLES, PEARLS, AND PUDDLES

JIM TREFETHEN's usually equable temper was ruffled. He stood gazing at his boat-house in surprised silence, and presently gave vent to his favorite exclamation.

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

On one side of the boat-house were crudely painted words, done in paint which was still wet.

The Wages of Sin is Death!

Pray and be Saved!

Believe or be Damned!

"I suppose the man who did that thinks he's helping the Lord; but he might've asked leave to use my shed."

He called to Ma, who was working in the garden. "Just come here, Ma. Now, look at that!"

"It's very badly done," observed Ma. "But I suppose the man meant well."

"Yes, he's probably another of the happy band of well-meaners who are so often ill-doers. To my mind it's a poor way of advertising salvation. It

makes religion look like a danger-signal. I'm going to paint it out. I have half a can of paint left inside, and I'll do it now."

"Well, the boat-house needed a fresh coat of paint badly," remarked Ma in soothing tones.

"Do you remember a few years ago," said Jim, as he began to obliterate the threatening words, "the man who climbed down the Great Lion rock and painted the word 'Hell' all over it? He was another of those well-meaners. When he had used up all his paint he found that he couldn't climb up again. So Tom Potts and I had to risk our lives and go down to save him. I told him afterwards that when the Lord made that rock He didn't intend that the devil should use it for advertising his business. But he said he did it to warn the fishermen and sailors going out to sea how near hell they were; which is one way of looking at it. My idea is that it's a heap better to feel how near you are to heaven, and forget all about the other place."

Ma went back to the garden. She sat with her sewing on a shady seat under a cherry-tree, which was rubied over with ripening fruit.

Toni had gone to the station to see her grandfather leave for the South. On her way home she tripped down the lane to see Ma and Jim, to tell them the joyful news. A rasping squeal of the

weighted gate-chain informed Ma that some one was entering the garden; and she turned to see the merry-faced girl coming through the leafy aisle of lilacs.

“Why, Toni!” she exclaimed. “How happy you look!”

“I have good reason to be happy, Ma!” replied Toni, giving her a kiss. “Oh, Ma, be happy with me! My father will soon be free. Grandfather has had one of the biggest criminal lawyers in the country working on the case, and everything will soon be straightened out. He left by the three-eighteen train for New York; and then he is going down South to bring Daddy home to me. Oh! isn’t it wonderful!”

Ma’s eyes shone with love and tender sympathy. “My dear, you deserve this! Oh, we must tell Jim at once! Jim!” she called, “come up here a moment!”

Jim wiped out the final word of the exhortations with a wide sweep of the brush. “Coming, Ma.”

“Well, I say!” he exclaimed. “What’ve you two been doing to yourselves? Why, you look as if you had both been polished up with joy; you’re so sparkling and happy.”

“The whole world has been polished for me!” replied Toni; and she related the glad tidings.

"Well, I'm jiggered! Toni, you've got your reward at last; and you've earned it, my girl!" He patted her hand gently.

She looked up with a grateful smile, and then she turned to Ma.

"Ma, we really owe our happiness to you; for Grandfather told me last night that it was you who persuaded him to have Daddy's affairs investigated."

"I just suggested it to him," said Ma diffidently.

"Ah! but if you hadn't done that, Daddy might still be considered guilty, might still be in prison. So you have brought this wonderful happiness into our lives. For Grandfather wouldn't have had that great lawyer and detective clear everything up, if you hadn't spoken to him about it. It's something I can never repay, but it has made me love you more and more!"

"Ma's repaid!" cried Jim, with tears shining in his kind, honest eyes. "Love clears all debts. Toni, I guess you understand, without my telling you, that Ma and I are rejoicing with you over this."

"Indeed we are," added Ma.

"And it's great to see you look happy. That little hurt look has gone from your eyes. Ma and

I often spoke of it. It was there even when you laughed. And in all your trouble you've been brave and cheerful. You didn't break down often. You and Alexander have been a fine pair."

"I sent a letter to Lex this afternoon, for I wanted him to know of my happiness at once."

"Yes," remarked Ma. "You and Alexander've had a great struggle, like seeds striving to push their way up through the clay. But you've both reached the air and sunshine, and your troubles are over."

"Yes, our real big troubles are over," sighed Toni happily. "There may be storms, with mists and rain, but we can always hang a rainbow on every cloud."

"I calculate life will be fairly easy for you now," went on Jim. "For you've learned the lessons sorrow had to teach you—patience, and courage, and cheer. We all have to learn those lessons."

Ma took Jim's hand in hers. "Toni, I almost envy your father his joy when he sees you. I think he'll feel as Jim and I will some day, when we see our little children again. Your father will see heaven in your face."

"And I shall see heaven in his," finished Toni.

The whirligig of time moved slowly during the days following Grandfather's departure; and the

hours seemed, to Toni, to crawl with the pace of snails. With impatient eagerness she longed for the day of her father's coming. She couldn't read, she couldn't work, for she was all a-tingle with excitement and joy. Even the placid Cecily became excited, and Basil mooned and dreamed at the piano, forgetting to come to his meals and working himself into a state of nervous exhaustion.

At last the day arrived! Toni wakened early and ran across to the open window. A cool morning breeze blew over her night-gowned form and tossed the curls from her forehead. There was a sparkle over the sky, the sea, and the garden,—the freshness and purity of a new-born day.

“Oh! what a glorious world to be glad in! I can hear the morning-stars singing!” she cried. “Wake up, Cecily! To-day is here. Oh, don't miss a moment of it! The morning has kissed the sea and made it blush with joy.”

Cecily opened her eyes and yawned. “Ow-ow-ow! I think I'll go—ow-ow-ow!” She snuggled sleepily under the downy comforter, which was sprinkled with blue poppies.

“Oh, come on! Don't be lazy. Get your bathing-suit on and join me in a swim.” Toni threw a bath-towel at her. A bathing-suit, stockings, and canvas shoes quickly followed; and Cecily, with a

final yawn and stretch of the arms, sat up just in time to be slapped in the face with a rubber cap.

"The tide's in, and every wave is wooing us. Come on, Miss Sleepiness; a swim will polish your wits. There! I've rolled up your clothes, and we will dress in the boat-house."

The girls, clad in their bathing-suits, were soon skipping through the garden. Dewy cobwebs glistened everywhere, like silver flagree, and flowers smiled through their morning tears.

Toni stooped and kissed the dew from an opening lily. "See! she has been weeping all night for the sun. You beautiful, white princess! Wake up, the sun has come to kiss you."

"Oooh! it's too chilly to be poetical," complained Cecily with a shiver, and wrapping her bath-towel about her shoulders.

They tripped down the rough steps leading to the beach. Toni sang as they ran along to the boat-house, where they left their clothes and towels.

"Come unto these yellow sands
And then take hands;
Curtsied when you have and kissed
The wild waves whist."

They joined hands and danced into the waves with a splash and shrill cries of delight.

"Boo-oo-ooo! it's c-c-c-co-co-cold-ld-ld!" cried Cecily, and her teeth clicked like castanets. "I w-w-w-wish I'd st-st-stayed in b-b-b-bed."

"It's gl-gl-glorious-st-st-sssst!" replied Toni, spitting out a mouthful of salty water, as an unexpected wave dashed into her face.

After a brief swim they raced along the beach and then sat in the sand, which was already slightly warmed by the sun.

"It's going to be hot to-day," said Cecily, as she covered her legs with sand. "Oh, look at this wonderful, satiny piece of seaweed! It looks like the frill of a sea-nymph's dress."

Toni took the weed in her hands. "How pretty it is! Poor little exile from the sea, torn from its home of coral and pearly shells and thrown on the bare sands of a strange world! I'm going to throw it back."

"It will only be washed up again," remarked Cecily.

"Perhaps so; but I'm so happy myself that I want to help everything else to be happy, even a torn piece of seaweed. Good-by, little leaf of the sea!" She tossed it, with a boyish swing of her arm, into the water.

"Oh, Toni, you are queer! That weed isn't capable of any sensation. It just grows and dies

and there's the end of it," the practical Cecily observed.

"Now, how do you know that?" demanded Toni. "Perhaps you are right; but I like to think that everything in nature *feels* and *understands* in its own way. The flowers give so much joy to us that I hate to see a blossom stepped on and bruised; and it's a tragedy to see flowers that have been plucked and then thrown carelessly away on the dusty roadside."

Cecily laughed. "How inconsistent you are! You are always gathering flowers and leaves and bringing them into the house."

"Of course! I bring them in and care for them until they die. Even then I never throw them away. I always take the withered flowers back to the garden and lay them on the ground under the shrubbery. The flowers don't mind being gathered for the joy and pleasure they give, but it must hurt them terribly to be thrown away. I like to believe that there is a personality in everything. The pines seem so wise and wonderful, and I wish I could understand their runes. They are like old bards of the forest, chanting the forgotten language of the trees. And the flowers are fairies who might have left the world ages ago, but they chose to stay in order to give joy to mortals."

"H'm!" Cecily looked doubtful.

"Look at this little pebble! Where did it come from, I wonder! Perhaps from the shore of the submerged Atlantis. Is it satisfied with being a pebble? Perhaps it longs to be a pearl!"

"Oh, Toni, you put fairy-tales into everything!" cried Cecily, leaping out of her tomb of sand. "I believe you could see a poem in a mud-puddle."

"I could see a bit of blue cloud reflected in it, for even a puddle can dream of the sky," answered Toni with a laugh.

"You are so intense," went on Cecily, as they dressed. "You are like the ocean, all sparkle and dancing waves of delight, or else deep, gray gloom of despair."

"And often tempestuous," interrupted Toni. "You, my dear Cecily, are like a little brook, flecked with sunlight, chattering and rippling over mossy stones, with violets and ferns and dainty forget-me-nots. Everything about you is sweet, fresh, and cheerful."

"If you were unkindly truthful, you'd add,—'shallow,'" said Cecily with a hug. "But I'd rather be a merry brook than a great old ocean, even if it has pearls of wisdom hidden in its heart. What is Basil like?"

"Basil is a pool, dreamy and still, but watered

by fresh springs of fancy and ideals. So he isn't a stagnant pool. There is no slime of sentimentality about him. He doesn't produce rank weeds, but lilies of romance. Which reminds me: we are going to Chandler's Pond this morning to gather water-lilies for that flat green bowl in the room Dad is to have. Do you remember, when he and Mother went boating together, they always brought back water-lilies? So I want some of them to welcome him when he comes. And that wonderful jade bowl was made for lilies. Whoop! there's Delia's breakfast-bell! I'll race you to the house!"

CHAPTER XXVII

TREED BY TAURUS

AFTER breakfast they left the house and met Kathryn, with Teddy and Bobby, at the beginning of Willow Lane, which dipped through clover-fields and meadows to Chandler's Pond.

Except for two bare ruts carved by wheel-tracks, the lane was carpeted with moss and grass. On either side the banks sloped upward, and a rail-fence twined with poison ivy zigzagged along the top. The willows spread their great branches from side to side. They kept the lane cool and shady in summer, and in winter their yellow twigs gleamed against the gray and white of cloud and snow, like a memory of summer's lost sunshine.

At the end of Sawyer's pasture the lane turned and became a thread-like path. It followed the errant windings of a brook whose crystalline clearness had earned it the soubriquet, Silver Brook. It was a little baby-stream, flowing between borders of violet-studded moss; sometimes combing and smoothing the long water-grasses and then budding into foam as it rippled over the stones.

"Look at Sawyer's cows!" cried Cecily, as they turned into the path. "Standing in that long grass they look as if they had no legs. I love to see cows in a meadow; it's so peaceful, so—so —— What's the word the poets use?"

"Bucolic?" suggested Teddy.

"Yes, that's it! It's so boculic—no, I mean cubolic—er—bucolic."

They all laughed at Cecily's struggle with her consonants.

"Some day, Cecily, you'll get lockjaw with your mutilated talk," said Bobby.

Cecily smiled blissfully. "Now, a cow isn't really poetic, is it? But a poet writes of pastoral peace, the mild-eyed cows standing in the slush grass ——"

"*Slush* grass!" There was a peal of laughter from Teddy.

"You mean *lush* grass, Cecily," corrected Toni.

"Oh, yes! But 'lush' sounds so unfinished, though I suppose it is more poetic than 'slush.' There's 'splash,' too. In a poem it is always 'plash.'"

When they reached the pond they found the punt moored to one of the willows. They pushed out through the purple flags and bulrushes, and soon

were drifting among the round, flat leaves and waxy lilies.

"They look like swan-boats for fairy Lohengrins," said Toni, as she pulled up a flower with half-open petals.

"Or chalices, with golden wine," added Bobby.

He held up a hard green bud. "One would never dream that this little knob held so much beauty with a heart of gold."

"No, Bobus!" rejoined Teddy. "It's just like your head—hard and green."

With a well-aimed throw, Bobby hit Teddy on the nose with the lily-bud.

"O dear! how the summer is going!" cried Kathryn. "In a few more weeks the holidays will be over, and we shall be separated."

"Yep!" said Teddy. "Here we are, happy and gay, care-free and all the rest of it. Let's dip into the future, and pull up the unopened buds of time. I shall be the seer; and I'll begin with old Bobus. This fall he goes to Bowdoin. Ten years hence he'll be a professor and look like a dried lima bean, 'with spectacles on nose,' spouting poetry and writing books which all who run may read, and all who read will run—away!"

"What about me?" asked Cecily.

"You will marry a wealthy man, and spend your

life on a cushion, sewing fine seams and eating up bushels of chocolate creams. You will always be very pretty, and will end up by becoming tremendously fat." There was a general laugh at this prophecy.

"Kathryn will be an ardent suffragette," went on Teddy. "She'll parade and speechify on empty soap-boxes at street-corners; she'll smash mirrors in beauty-parlors, wear no corsets, and crush man, vile creature, under her flat-heeled number nine shoe. In spite of all this, she'll end in meekly adoring and marrying *me!*"

"I *will not!*" declared Kathryn in emphatic denial.

"Take me next," laughed Toni.

"Toni, you'll do something to make the world hum. You'll write a book, or invent a studless shirt, or become the high-priestess of some new, weird religion. You'll fall violently in love and break your heart several times before you settle down as sock-darner-in-chief for some man who will be either a poet or a pork-butcher."

"What about yourself, Master Theodore?" inquired Bobby.

Teddy inflated his chest. "Ah! *myself!* I'm going to business college this fall, and next spring my uncle in Boston takes me into his office—to dust

the stools and wipe the pens, I think. From being a mere office-worm, I shall rise to a lofty eminence of prosperity—quite overtopping our friends Carnegie, Rockefeller, and Vanderbilt. I shall give all my investments a Midas touch. I shall be a modern Croesus!”

“Oh, listen to him!” cried Toni derisively.

“It does seem queer to think of growing up. This year will make a great difference to us all,” remarked Cecily.

“Yes,” added Toni. “This particular year marks a turning of the road for each of us. To begin with, we are all leaving the Academy. There’s Wellesley for you, Kathryn; and Bowdoin for Bobus; and Teddy starts out on his way to prosperity; and Cecily and I are going with our people to India and Japan. When this year is over, how different life will seem to us all!”

After tying the punt to the willow, they scorned the path, and, with their hands filled with lilies, took a short cut through the meadows.

“I don’t want to go near those cows. I’m a dreadful coward where cows are concerned,” said Cecily anxiously, as they crawled under the fence.

“The cows are peaceful, harmless creatures,” said Teddy; “and Sawyer’s bull is safe in the field over there, so there is nothing to be afraid of.

When Ben Sawyer bought the bull last year, I stood sponsor for it and named it Claude Melnotte. He's a vicious person, so we'll avoid his pasture."

When they were half-way across the large meadow, a low exclamation from Teddy made them start.

"Run like blazes, girls! The bull is loose!"

They heard a menacing roar, and saw a bulky, red form careering toward them.

"That tree is our only hope!" panted Bobby. "Climb for your lives!"

Cecily was paralyzed with fright. She stumbled and fell as Toni seized her hand. Bobby grasped her other hand—and again she fell. They could hear the dull, heavy thuds of the wild creature's hoofs coming nearer behind them. Teddy and Kathryn reached the tree first, and he assisted her into the lower branches.

"Leave me!" gasped Cecily. "Save yourselves—I can't run!"

"You must run—you must!" cried Toni frantically.

"Go on, girls," urged Bobby. "I'll stop him for a moment. Drag her along, Toni. It's the only chance."

He dropped Cecily's hand and tore off his Norfolk jacket. A shrill scream of terror came from

Kathryn. Toni jerked and pulled Cecily, and Teddy came forward to assist them. They pushed the weak, breathless girl up the tree, aided by Kathryn, who reached down with helping hands.

Meantime Bobby stood waiting to receive the charge of the infuriated animal. He gave one swift glance at the tree, and saw Toni disappear into the branches, with a swirl of petticoats and two dangling, long legs.

"Climb up, Ted!" he called, and advanced to meet the bull. He could feel the hot breath as he stepped lightly on one side and threw his jacket over the horns and head of Claude Melnotte.

Blinded and hampered by the garment from which he could not free himself, the bull paused and proceeded to tear it to shreds. Bobby rushed to the tree. Teddy had propped a stick against the trunk and stood at the foot of the tree, waiting to assist the brave boy. Toni pulled and Teddy pushed the fat Bobby up; and then Teddy, who was lithe and thin, reached safety just in time.

"You stupid!" growled Bobby. "Why did you wait down there until I came?"

"Shut up! The girls were safe, and you are so fat you needed a boost," replied Teddy.

Claude Melnotte stood beneath the tree, pawing the ground and making the dirt fly in all directions.

"You horrid thing! Go home!" cried Cecily with sweet, gentle insistence, when the bull stood still and gazed upward.

Bobby laughed. "Cecily, you couldn't frighten a flea with those sugary words."

The bull glared at them with fiery eyes.

"Cruel, cruel Claude!" said Teddy, in tones of exaggerated reproach.

"You vicious fiend!" added Kathryn, shaking her fist.

"Oh, Bobby, that was splendid of you!" cried Toni.

"Rats!" ejaculated Bobby.

"We've lost our lilies," observed Cecily regretfully.

"I have two of mine left, but they are squashed to a slimy pulp," said Toni, and she threw her spoiled blossoms aside.

This roused the bull, and he advanced towards the tree with an angry roar. Cecily squealed with terror.

"I hope we aren't going to be marooned here all day," remarked Teddy after a pause.

"We'll have to stay here until some one comes after that bull, or he moves off to the other meadow where he belongs," said Bobby. "It wouldn't be safe for any of us to venture from

this tree while His Majesty elects to remain in this field."

"And he seems to be quite satisfied with his surroundings at present," groaned Toni.

"Where *should* we have been without this tree for a refuge?" cried Kathryn in agonized tones.

"The meadow would have been like a gory battlefield strewn with the fragments of Claude's unfortunate victims," replied Teddy.

Half an hour drifted by with desultory conversation.

"Oh, my legs!" Toni shifted her position.

"I'm all pins and needles!" exclaimed Cecily, squirming. "I feel like a human pincushion."

The bull began to graze peacefully, but at intervals he would dash towards the tree with loud bellowings.

"I'm so hungry; it must be dinner-time," wailed Teddy.

"And I'm nearly dead with thirst," said Toni.

"So am I," added Bobby; and he sang with doleful mien:

"How dry I am! How dry I am!
Nobody knows how dry I am!"

It was a sultry day, and the sun beat upon the tree with August fervor.

"Cecily, there's a worm exploring down your neck," announced Bobby after a long silence.

"Ow! Ow!" Cecily almost fell out of the tree; and Toni calmly picked off the fat, green worm and transferred it to Bobby's sleeve.

Teddy began to chew a willow twig. "Say, people, I'm a good runner. Suppose you get this attentive person below interested in a conversation on Art, or Loving Kindness, or the best method of putting up mixed pickles, while I sneak down and go for help."

"Can't be done. The beast would get you sure," declared Bobby.

As if to prove the boy's assertion, Claude Melnotte rent the air with infuriated roars.

"'Oh, speak again, bright angel!'" quoted Teddy in ecstasy.

"I shouldn't mind this at all," began Toni; "only if we don't get home by five, we'll miss Dad's arrival." She sighed pathetically.

"I'd rather miss Dad than have him greeted with our rangled merains—I mean our mangled remains," said Cecily with consoling philosophy.

"You're right, Cecily; but your speech made me feel like a meringue."

Kathryn yawned. "Can't some one do something to wile away these tedious hours?"

"Somebody sing a hymn," suggested Teddy.
"Anything to be gay."

"I suppose we might say that we're having a *bully* time!" said Toni. "Now, everybody, laugh, please!"

Teddy began to sing in a drawling voice, and the others chimed in to the tune of "Auld Lang Syne."

"We're here because we're here; we're here
Because we're here, we're here:
We're here because we're here, we're here
Because we're here, we're here!"

They sang the senseless ditty over and over; and one by one they dropped out until Teddy wailed the last line by himself. There was a long silence, occasionally punctuated with sighs and groans.

"I feel like an ancient Christian martyr about to be given to a wild bull in the arena," observed Cecily.

"I'm an Andromeda, not chained to a rock, but *treed*! Oh, for a Perseus to come to my aid!" Toni declaimed to the brazen sky.

"Say! I have an idea!" said Bobby.

"A *what*?" they chorused in scorn, which implied doubt of his assertion.

"An *idea*!" he smiled patronizingly. "Listen! I've thought out a poem! Ahem!"

"O day of woe!" Teddy imploringly clasped his hands. He closed his eyes and sat with a resigned expression, as if prepared for the worst.

"Let's hear it, Bobs," chuckled Toni.

Teddy groaned.

"What is it about?" inquired Kathryn.

Bobby expanded his chest. "*Us!*"

"*Us?*" Teddy showed a faint sign of interest.

"*Me?* Am *I* in it?"

"Listen!" Bobby began:

"The hours of morn were flying fast,
As through a grassy meadow passed
Two handsome youths and maidens three;
A bull sang in an angry key—
 'Excelsior!'

"The bull came dashing o'er the heath,
He roared and bellowed through his teeth;
And like a burst of thunder rung
The accents of that awful tongue—
 'Excelsior!'

"There, I'm stumped! You go on with it, Toni!"

Toni laughed. "Oh, er—er ——

"They shrieked and dashed across the lea;
Those girls and boys, how they did flee!
The bull pursued, his wild eyes shone,
And from their lips escaped a groan—
 'Excelsior!'

'Let's climb the tree!' brave Teddy said,
 'Or else we'll all of us be dead;
 Tossed, gored, and mangled, thrown aside!
 And loud the angry bull replied,
 'Excelsior!' ''

"I'll speak now," broke in Teddy; and he took up the parody.

"Go on!" a maiden said; 'don't wait,
 I know that I shall make you late!
 A tear stood in her bright blue eye,
 The bull still answered with a sigh,
 'Excelsior!'

'Beware the willow's withered branch,
 Beware the awful avalanche
 Of Kathryn tumbling from the height!
 Quoth Toni, as they climbed in fright,
 Excelsior!

Go on, Bobus! I'm graveled for lack of matter," finished Teddy.

Bobby looked very solemn as he intoned:

"Their hearts were sad, the hours went slow,
 The angry bull remained below;
 They sang a hymn, they said a prayer;
 The bull roared through the startled air,
 'Excelsior!'

"They felt a gnawing hunger soon,
 For day had passed the hour of noon.
 They yearned for home and wondered why
 They must stay here to starve and die!
 Excelsior!

Go ahead, somebody!"

"I have it!" Toni said eagerly.

"There in the ages yet unsung,
Five bony skeletons they hung;
And *Taurus* shone serene and far—
A brilliant zodiacal star:
Excelsior!"

Another drowsy silence drifted by.

"A *man!*" shrieked Cecily. "A man! I see a man!" She waved her arms frantically.

"A man?" Teddy clung to the tree like a shipwrecked sailor to a mast. "Oh, where?"

"There!" She pointed towards the lane. "It's a man, a *real* man! And he's alive!"

"It's Mandy Fly's new summer-boarder," said Bobby. "*Hi!* HI!"

They all shouted to attract the man's attention. The bull began to paw the ground.

"Help! Help!" they called.

The stranger heard them and began to climb the fence.

"No, no, no! Go back, *go back!*" they yelled, as he walked towards the tree.

The man was evidently puzzled. "What the dickens do you want?"

"Bull! Mad! Go back! *Bull!*" shouted Bobby, with all the force of his lungs, in brief explanation of their dilemma. The bull added a

bellow which apprised the man of the situation, and he immediately did a lightning disappearing-act over the fence.

"Cheer up!" he called. "I'll go for help," and he hurried along the lane.

The time dragged on. They became hungrier, weaker, and hotter.

"Oh!" moaned Kathryn. "Who speaks first to carry my corpse home? I know I shall expire before help comes."

"It must be five, if not after," said Toni dejectedly.

At last they saw a procession of men armed with ropes and pitchforks coming over the field.

"Don't make any noise," commanded Bobby, repressing Cecily's attempt to call. "It will disturb Claude, and make it harder for them to catch him."

The bull turned and faced the approaching men.

"Oh, they will all be tossed and killed before our eyes!" cried Cecily, covering her face with her hands.

"No, they won't," said Bobby with reassuring confidence. "They know how to manage the brute. Jim Trefethen is a wonder with animals."

"I feel as if we were in Spain, about to see a

bull-fight," remarked Toni. "On come the matadors!"

Claude began to switch his tail, and a faint, threatening roar made the girls tremble. Jim Trefethen came on, quietly and slowly, speaking in firm, even tones.

"Come, old boy! What's the trouble? Say, I can tell you where there's a fine bran mash waiting for you. You just come along with me!"

The bull roared. Jim came nearer.

"Oh, I can't look!" murmured Kathryn, and she hid her face in her arm.

Toni gazed in fascinated horror. Jim approached, his gaze firmly fixed on the excited bull. "Will he be impaled on those curved horns, and tossed into the air?" thought Toni. For a brief moment she saw nothing but a blurred mass of leaves and sky. With a frightened gasp she looked down and shuddered.

Jim stood beside Claude, feeding him with an apple.

"There, there!" he said as he patted the animal and adroitly fastened a chain in the nose-ring. Two of the men came up and led Claude away.

Jim looked up at the tree and laughed. "Well, I guess you young folks have been treed long enough."

He helped the girls down; and there were many exclamations over their stiff, aching limbs.

“Cecily and Toni, your aunts have been worrying about you. Cæsar Silas went over to the pond to look for you; but he calculated that you weren’t drowned, as he found the punt moored safely to the willow, and he didn’t suppose you’d gone in swimming among the rushes. He went over the other way, so that’s how he missed seeing you in the tree. I met him driving to the station for your father and grandfather. I advised him not to say anything about your absence to them. I was just starting out with Polly Feemus to search for you when Ben Sawyer asked me to come and hypnotize Claude.”

“Oh, do let us hurry, Cecily!” cried Toni.

“I guess you’re both mighty eager to get home,” observed Jim. “So I have Polly Feemus at the end of the lane, and I’ll drive you home lickety-split. I told Cæsar Silas to drive slow; so I guess we’ll beat him. Suffering Samson! you must have had a hungry, lively time up that tree! I’ll be jiggered!”

CHAPTER XXVIII

“MERRILY, MERRILY, SHALL I LIVE NOW!”

JIM urged Polly Feemus along at her fastest gait, and the horse responded with a lively trot; yet the drive seemed interminable to the eager, impatient girls.

Cecily's face was flushed, but her hair was neat and her middy was clean. She was one of those fortunate persons who always contrive to look well under any circumstances. Toni had lost her hair-ribbon, and her hair hung in a loose, untidy mass about her shoulders. Pieces of willow-bark and leaves were tangled in her curls, and her middy was slimed over with the crushed lilies. Her face was grimy, for she had frequently brushed back stray curls with her dirty hands. Her knuckles were grazed, and a deep scratch on her forehead contributed to her dilapidated appearance.

“Cecily, you are positively aggravating!” she complained. “You look so fresh and clean. There isn't a hair awry, and your middy is immaculate compared to mine. I'd like to slap you.”

Cecily laughed. “You do seem to have a knack of attracting dirt, Toni.”

“I guess I know something else she has the knack of attracting,” observed Jim, and he clicked his tongue to Polly Feemus. “She draws hearts to her like a magnet, and she holds them fast.”

“You’re right, Jim,” agreed Cecily. “When hearts are trumps, Toni always wins.”

Aunt Olivia, pale and anxious, met them at the door. After a hurried explanation they rushed upstairs to wash and dress. Cecily was soon ready, looking fresh and sweet in her white dimity and blue ribbons. Toni’s hair was snarly, buttons wouldn’t fit into their button-holes, and all her belongings seemed to be playing hide-and-seek, for she could find nothing she wanted. Her clean stockings were lying loose in her bureau drawer, and they *wouldn’t* match.

“O dear! with all this hosiery there ought to be twin stockings somewhere!”

A shower of stockings was tossed on the bed.

“Where *is* my other slipper?” Two rubbers and one tennis-shoe came flying from the cupboard to the middle of the floor.

“There, you’re ready, Cecily! And here am I not half dressed. O dear!” She tore at a snarl in

her hair. "My fingers are so clumsy. They aren't even thumbs—they're *toes!*"

"Here are your stockings and slippers ready," said Cecily good-naturedly. "Let me fasten your dress. Why, you have it all wrong! No wonder you couldn't manage it. Keep still, or I can't do it. You're wriggling like an eel."

"Oh! there's the carriage!" wailed Toni. "Don't wait for me, Cecily. Go down!"

"Well, if you don't mind——" Cecily disappeared.

Cecily reached the front door just as the carriage drew up before the steps. With a cry of joy she threw herself into her father's arms. He was a tall, dark man, with a thin, sensitive face which had a peculiar yellow pallor, due to close confinement. His black hair was sprinkled with gray, and his eyes held a wistful, tender expression.

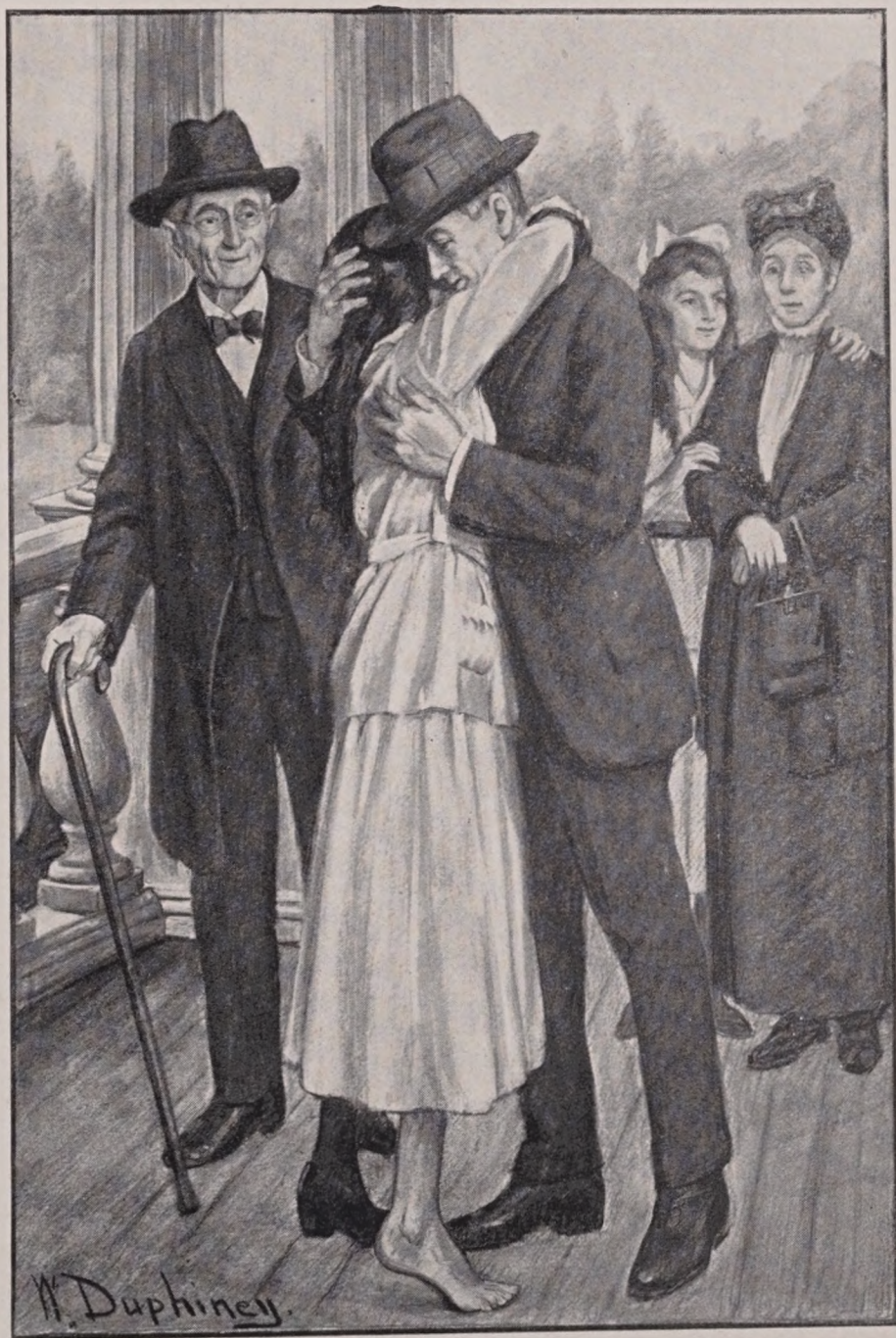
After all the greetings were over he looked about expectantly.

"Where's my girl?" he asked.

There was a whirl and flutter of skirts down the dark stairway.

"Dad! Dad!" a voice cried from the shadows, and Toni rushed out to the steps.

"My brave little girl! My Toni, my blessing!" he murmured as she clung to him.



"MY BRAVE LITTLE GIRL! MY TONI, MY BLESSING!" — Page 358.

There was a long embrace.

“Weel, it’s nae welcome I’m getting,” said a soft voice.

Toni turned quickly. “Jean!” she cried.

“Yes, my Bit Lady, it’s Jean. My, but you’re a sicht for sair een!”

“I didn’t think you’d be completely happy without the Scotch thistle, Toni,” said Grandfather, stepping forward.

Toni gasped with delight. “You dear old Grandfather! or Fairy Godfather, I should call you!” she exclaimed, kissing him joyously.

“He deserves that name, Toni,” said her father; and he drew her to his arms again.

“I wish you could see yourself, Toni,” remarked Basil; and they all laughed at her disheveled appearance.

Her dress was partly unbuttoned; her hair hung about her shoulders; one foot was bare, and the stocking that should have covered it was pulled up on her right arm; on the other foot she wore a rubber; and her hair-ribbon was tied about her neck.

“My wits went woozy when I heard the carriage!” she cried. “I just had to rush down to you, Dad. Oh, thank you, Grandfather, for giving me my father! I’ll go up now and make myself presentable.”

"Let me go wi' ye, my lassie; and I'll dress your hair like the guid auld times," said Jean.

"And I'll show Father up to his room," added Cecily.

"We are going to have supper in the garden. It will be ready soon," warned Aunt Olivia.

It was a happy meal under the trees. Toni sat between her father and grandfather. Although she was hungry, she was too much excited to eat. With contented little sighs she would stroke her father's hand or press her face against his sleeve. Then she would turn to her grandfather and give his hand a gentle squeeze.

After Delia had cleared the dishes away, the two men smoked. Toni insisted on lighting their pipes for them.

"You see I haven't forgotten how to do it, Daddy," she said. "Nor am I too big to sit on your knee, as I used to do."

She cuddled into his arms. "Draw your chair a little nearer, Grandfather," she added, reaching out for his hand.

She gazed at the sky with happy eyes. "Oh, look at that wonderful cone-shaped cloud! It looks like a Fujiyama rising out of a rosy-gold mist."

"In a few months from now we'll be looking at the real Fujiyama instead of a cloud-mountain,"

observed Cecily. “I have always wanted to go to Japan, because I like the Japanese tea-cups and fans so much.”

“And I have always longed to ride in those grown-up baby-carriages they have in Japan,” laughed Toni. “Those—what do you call them?—jinksy-winksy things.”

“You mean jinrikisha—the Japs’ pull-man-cars,” said Basil.

“Oh, won’t it be glorious!” cried Cecily. “And think how unhappy we were last year! We thought we were the most miserable people in the world. How everything has changed!”

“Yes, Cecily,” agreed Grandfather. He turned to Aunt Olivia. “Olivia, you and Priscilla have renewed your youth, and I—I have renewed my heart. Life is worth living now.”

“We owe it to the children, Basil,” was Aunt Olivia’s response.

“It was a day of good fortune for us when these three little exiles arrived in Peacedale. We were a trio of fossils before they came. Humph!” continued Aunt Priscilla.

“And it was fortunate for the little exiles.” Mr. Hamilton smiled, and there was a soft light in his eyes, which were like Toni’s, but without the star-shine that gleamed in hers.

“I feel like singing Ariel’s song,” said Toni. “‘Merrily, merrily, shall I live now.’ Grandfather, you are Prospero. With your magic art you have untangled all the snarls of our lives; you have charmed the elements and helped us to reach the Land of Happy-ever-after.”

Crickets chirred, and the croak of a frog came through the air, mellowed by distance. The moon climbed over the tree-tops and silvered the garden, save where velvety shadows lurked beneath the boughs. Moon-rays rippled and wavered over the sea; and the foam-fringed waves kissed the shore with a gentle, swishing sound. A hidden bird in a neighboring tree woke suddenly from a dream of the dawn, and piped a little fluty tune, as though he thought the morning had already come.

“It’s good to be alive,” murmured Toni. “To love and to be together—for always. This sad, weary year seems to be fading away like mist; and, in looking back, we shall see every cloud wreathed with rainbows ——”

“And at the end of every rainbow will be gold—rainbow gold,” finished her father.

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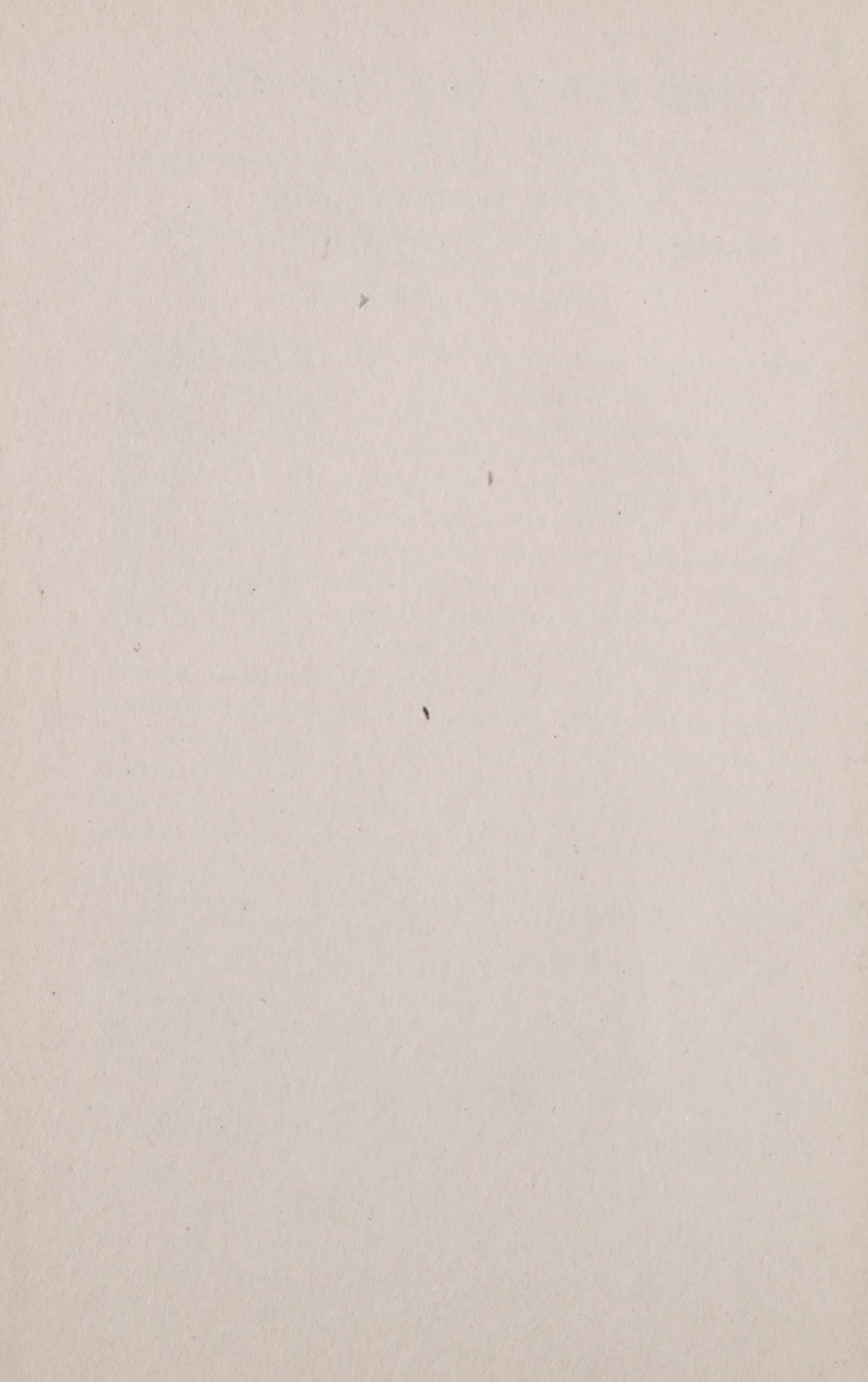
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